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SKETCHES OF SERMONS

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FURNISHED BY

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“ So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.”—NEHEMIAH VIII 8

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SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

I. THE FIRST TRANSGRESSION CONDEMNED.

GEN. III. 17, 18, 19.

“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, ‘Thou shalt not eat of it,’ &c.

It is among the observations which the wisest of men has recorded for our instruction, that “wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness;” and that “for the soul to be without knowledge is not good.” And it will be readily allowed that, amidst the variety of subjects to which our attention may be called, it behoves us especially to cultivate an acquaintance with ourselves and our condition. On this ground we esteem it at once creditable and profitable to a person, that, while his mind is well furnished with general information, he is particularly acquainted with those events and institutions in which he has an especial interest, and which greatly affect the community of which he is a member. Among the institutions of a free and civilized state, there is none more important and imposing than that which provides for the administration of justice, and the protection of our property and our lives. The entrance of the judge, the opening of his commission, his taking the seat of judgment, the arraignment of the criminals, &c. are matters of peculiar solemnity. And if a culprit is to be tried for a crime of unusual atrocity, and one in which many are implicated, or by which society may be extensively affected, a crowded attendance evinces the strength of interest felt by the multitudes who anxiously watch the proceedings, and anticipate the verdict. But, if

we justly feel concerned in an event which involves the fate of comparatively a few individuals, with what interest should we listen to proceedings which deeply affect the whole human family; such are those to which my text refers. In the first chapter of this book, we find the parents of our race created pure and upright, and placed in a state of trial. In the third, we are informed of their temptation and rebellion. And here we see their Maker and their Judge coming to call them to their account; to convict them of their crimes; and to pronounce their sentence. Our text more particularly records the crime proved, and the sentence pronounced.

I. THE CRIME PROVED. Here we may remark, that the culprit does not dare to plead, 'Not guilty.' 'Tis true he blames his tempter, and indirectly blames God himself: yet he confesses the fact of his transgression, ver. 12. The Judge condemns the criminal's conduct in several particulars.—Instance,

1. *His listening and yielding to temptation*;—"Thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife." From temptation none are exempt. Nor is there any sin in being tempted. See the difference between being tempted and yielding to temptation in our Saviour's case, Matt. iv. 1—10. His resistance of repeated attempts was prompt and firm. By way of contrast, look at Eve, parleying with the tempter, and captivated by "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life," ver. 1—6. Which of these examples should we follow? A proper answer must consist with the following observations.—The relative situation of the tempter is no justification of our compliance. Has he been our benefactor? Such was Adam's tempter. His "help-mect," chap. ii. 20;—his only human support? The Hebrew children were under great obligations; yet they refused to sin, Dan. iii. 12. Or may the person who tempts us be our friend in future? All Adam's hopes and expectations from human kind centred in her who offered him the forbidden fruit. But this did not excuse him. Even Balaam says, "I cannot go beyond," &c. Num. xxii. 18. See also Dan. iii. 16; Heb. xi. 24.—The relation in which the tempter stands to us is no justification. Earthly ties can, in no other case, be so close as those which bound the parties in this transaction here condemned. She was

not only his wife, but literally part of himself, Gen. ii. 20—24. Hear our Lord's remarks, Matt. x. 32—36. The affection we may bear the tempter is no justification. As it is now the duty of husbands to love their wives, so, without question, Adam in his best estate was not deficient in this part of his duty. Milton, indeed, supposes that his affection for 'her, his sole delight,' was the only cause of his fall:

————— ' He took and ate,
Against his better knowledge ; not deceived ;
But fondly overcome of female charm.'

This view of the case seems to be supported by 1 Tim. ii. 14.—" Thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife." But

' Consciences and souls are made
To be the Lord's alone.'

2. *His neglect of God's word*;—" Which I commanded thee." Here is reference to supreme authority; "*I commanded*," who am *thy author*, &c.:—reference to almost unlimited indulgence; thou hast eaten of THE TREE—the *only* prohibited one; and this excepted only as a test of obedience, and a means of thy confirmation in holiness, and of rising to a higher felicity:—reference to friendly caution; he was forewarned of danger. Yet see,

3. *His open, positive transgression of a known law*;—" I commanded thee," personally and plainly; but "*thou hast eaten*." If, in the *first* transgression, we find on the part of Eve, vain curiosity, sensuality, and ambition; and on that of Adam, insubordination and idolatry, we may also mark the like principles and operation in sin in general, Gen. xxxiv. 1; Deut. xxxii. 15; Rom. i. 25; James i. 14, 15.

II. THE SENTENCE PRONOUNCED; — "*Cursed is the ground*," &c. We notice here,

1. *Deprivation*—of all the *fruits and pleasures of Eden*; enjoyed while living in obedience. Man is driven forth from the garden to procure "bread,"—and "herbs" from a "*cursed*" land. Precisely the case of backsliders; who, like the prodigal, feed on husks. Hence the candid acknowledgment and prudent resolution, Hos. ii. 7.

2. *Toil*;—" In the sweat," &c. God, who made nothing in vain, intended that his creatures should exercise their

powers. Holy angels are employed, (Ps. ciii. 20; Heb. i. 14;) so was innocent man, Gen. ii. 15; so is glorified man, Rev. vii. 15. But in sinful man, exercise degenerated into toil. So now, they who forsake God, *hew* cisterns, &c., Jer. ii. 13.

3. *Disappointment*;—"Thorns and thistles," &c. These shall interrupt thy labours, and mock thy hopes. See the effects of sin described, Haggai i. 6. Mark the caution, Prov. xxiii. 31. Whence,

4. *Sorrow*;—arising from vexatious disappointment, from a recollection of loss, from family feuds, chap. iv. 5; from gloomy anticipations; and this continually: "In sorrow—all the days," &c.

5. *Increasing infirmity*;—"Till thou return," &c. Adam was created in full vigour, but now he began to "return to the dust." His body became the subject of dissolution; and he might look forward to the time when "the strong men should bow," &c., Eccl. xii. 2—5. "*Dying*, thou shalt die."

6. *Death itself*;—"Unto dust shalt thou return," &c. This the final proof of his folly. And this might be the consummation of his punishment. For,

7. *Justice is tempered with mercy*. The sentence is not immediately executed. The criminal has a *respite*; a *subsistence*; and an *opportunity of repentance*.

Let the subject teach us,

1. *A lesson of humility*. We are the degenerate children of such a parent.

2. *A lesson of caution*. Mark the *process* of falling. Satan presents some suitable object. We appear, desire, covet, throw off restraint, and transgress, in intention, and in fact. Mark the *danger* of falling. Our first parents fell from their paradisiacal state, and by a small temptation. Wherefore, "watch," &c., Matt. xxvi. 41. For, mark the *consequences* of falling. All the evils we feel or fear.

3. *A lesson of encouragement*. Respited, we may recover our Eden, by means of "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven." Contrast—the first involving himself and us in guilt, pollution, and misery—the second the reverse of this, Rom. v. 12—21.

II. GOD'S EXPOSTULATION WITH CAIN.

GEN. IV. 7.

“ If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? and if thou doest not well, sin
heth at the door.”

THE latter part of the preceding chapter records the expulsion of Adam, with his guilty partner, from the dear delights of Eden, to reap the penal curse entailed upon them for their aggravated offence ; and, in the beginning of this chapter, we are presented with a brief narration of the births, occupations, and characters, of the first brothers of the human family. On the birth of Cain, his joyful mother exclaimed, “ I have gotten a man from the LORD ; ” fondly conceiving that her new-born son was the promised seed who should bruise the head of the serpent. Alas ! how different are the wishes of maternal tenderness from the real facts which the revolution of years frequently developes ! In process of time her second son is born, who is named Abel, which signifies *vanity*. This was either the effect of a foolish partiality to his elder brother, or an unintentional prediction of the brevity of his days. But these two brothers, though the heirs of the world, must both labour for a subsistence. The earth must be cultivated, and Cain tills the ground. Cattle must be sheltered and preserved from the ravages of wild beasts, and Abel keeps sheep. Both brothers brought offerings unto the Lord. The origin of sacrifice was divine. No man would have conjectured that a slaughtered animal, devoted to God, would have been pleasing in his sight, without a divine revelation. Those skins with which God clothed our first parents were most probably from beasts that had been offered in sacrifice. “ The LORD had respect unto Abel,” &c. God respected Abel, because he was a righteous man, and a man who offered his sacrifice in faith, Heb. xi. 4. But God had no respect for Cain, because he was a wicked man, 1 John iii. 12. God also respected the sacrifice of Abel ; it consisted of “ the firstlings of his flock,” &c., but no mention is made of Cain’s offering the first-fruits of his harvest ; he offered

the fruit of his ground, but we are left to conjecture what that fruit was. God manifested his approbation of Abel's offering, most likely by fire from heaven consuming the sacrifice. See Judges vi. 21; 1 Kings xviii. 38. By whatever means God made known his will to these two brothers, they were sufficiently declaratory to put them in possession of correct ideas on the subject. How Abel felt, we may easily conceive; and what Cain felt, we are told. He "was very wroth, and his countenance fell." Men are often angry when they ought to be grieved; they indulge wrathful dispositions against others, when they ought to turn their indignation against themselves. God expostulates with Cain, "Why art thou wroth?" A similar question he put to Jonah, "Doeest thou well to be angry? Why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doeest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" &c. From the text we deduce the following observations:

I. THAT THOSE WHO DO WELL, CANNOT FAIL TO SECURE DIVINE ACCEPTANCE.

II. THAT THOSE WHO NEGLECT TO DO WELL, WILL HAVE TO BLAME THEMSELVES ALONE FOR IT.

I. THAT THOSE WHO DO WELL, CANNOT FAIL TO SECURE DIVINE ACCEPTANCE. What is it to do well? We must not suffer our judgments to be biased by the opinions of men. To do well, with some, is to succeed in business. 'He is doing very well,' is a common phrase applied to a successful tradesman. Jonah thought he did well to be angry even unto death. To do well, in the sense in which the expression must be understood here, is—to bring an acceptable sacrifice to the LORD—and to offer it in an acceptable manner.

1. *Those do well who bring an acceptable offering unto the Lord.* Every religion upon earth has had its sacrifices; and people of all climes have been impressed with ideas of the necessity of offering something unto God. The Jews, especially, had their peace-offerings, their sin-offerings, their heave-offerings, their burnt-offerings, &c. Most of those offerings were but typical representations of the great sacrifice which Jesus was to offer up for the sin of the world; but we must not suppose that God has no claims upon us, or that we are exonerated from offering him any sacrifice. We must offer up our souls to him. "Thou desirest not

sacrifice," saith David, "else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," &c., Ps. li. 16, 17. Our understandings must be applied to know him; our wills to submit to his authority; our affections to love, reverence, and adore him; our memories to recollect his past kindness, &c. We must present our bodies a living sacrifice to him, Rom. xii. 1, our tongues to sing his praises, and to tell of all his wondrous works,—our feet to go to his house,—our hands to minister to the necessities of the afflicted, &c.—We must honour the Lord with our substance. He gives us power to get wealth; the world, and all that it contains, belong to him. "To do good, and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

2. *We must bring our offerings in an acceptable manner.* "By faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice," &c. Faith in Christ is the way to God. Christ sanctifies our gifts, and renders them acceptable to his Father. God is pleased with the sacrifice of his Son, and pleased with us, when we honour his Son, by believing in him, and depending upon his all-atoning sacrifice; "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" This, though put in an interrogatory form, carries with it all the importance of a positive declaration. Those who do well shall be accepted. They shall be received into favour. Cain was now under the displeasure of God; the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners; but when they cease from doing evil, and learn to do well, God accepts of them, receives them into his favour, and turns from them his threatened indignation, that they perish not.—They shall also be favoured with an evidence of their acceptance. God testified of Abel's gifts; gave a signal of his favourable regards: those whom God receives into his family have the spirit of adoption given to them.—We infer, from God's nature, that those who do well cannot fail of securing the divine acceptance; and we prove it from his immutable promises, and his gracious dealings with penitent sinners.

II. **THOSE WHO NEGLECT TO DO WELL WILL HAVE TO BLAME THEMSELVES ALONE FOR IT.** Moral action is inseparable from humanity, therefore he who neglects to do well does ill; negative good is positive evil.

1. *Those neglect to do well who offer to God no acceptable*

sacrifice. Sinners offer to God nothing but insults. Their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory; their souls and bodies, time and talents, are all desecrated from their original purpose. God is not in all their thoughts; they give him no homage, no devotion, no prayers, nor praises.

2. *Those neglect to do well who offer their sacrifices in an unacceptable manner.* Cain did this. The Jews, in Isaiah's time, had a multitude of sacrifices; but the manner in which they offered them was hateful to God, Isa. i. 13, 14. The ancient Pharisees offered many prayers to God, but they were influenced by selfish principles; "If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." This may mean, Sin is the sole preventive to thy doing well. Sin in the heart occasions sin in the life. If our actions do not harmonize with the word and will of God, sin stands in the way; some secret sin, some latent evil, holds dominion within. Sin lieth at the door—a sin offering, an animal proper to be offered, is now at the door of the fold. Critics say that the original word will bear this meaning; God intimating to Cain, that though his offering was rejected, yet his case was not hopeless. Sin lieth at the door, the guilt of sin is all thy own. Thou hast no one to blame but thyself. The final punishment of impenitent sinners will be the result of their wilful and un-necessitated crimes. God's conduct will be eternally justified by the damned themselves. Sin lieth at the door—the punishment of sin is near, even at the door. Punishment treads upon the heels of sin.

In conclusion we observe,

1. *God's expostulation with Cain reminds us of his willingness to save sinners.* Expostulations, containing similar sentiments, may be found, Ezek. xviii. 29, 31; Hos. xi. 8; Matt. xxiii. 37.

2. *It also serves as a ground of encouragement for those who have been doing ill, but wish to do better;* If thou doest well, shalt not thou be accepted? Let not the evil actions of the former part of thy life discourage thee. Repent, and turn thyself from all thy transgressions, so iniquity shall not be thy ruin.

3. *It leaves sinners without reasonable excuse.* The man who had not on a wedding garment was speechless.

BETA.

III. THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DOTH RIGHT.

GEN. xviii. 25.

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

SODOM was a wicked city before the Lord. "Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy," Ezek. xvi. 49. When Abraham put this question to the Lord, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" he was about to punish her with a mighty overthrow, that other sinners, in distant ages and nations, might dread his awful justice, and cast away their transgressions. Sodom was about to be "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire," Jude, 7; but Abraham, to whom the Lord revealed his secret purpose, interceded for her. Convinced that he would not slay the righteous with the wicked, he powerfully urged the great principle of equity and justice, until the Lord said, if ten righteous persons were found there, he would not destroy the place. There are two important truths in our text: First, the Lord is judge of all the earth; and, secondly, what he does is right. We shall add a few general observations on this subject.

I. THE LORD IS JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH.

1. The Lord is a judge. He sees and knows all things. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," Prov. xv. 3. He weighs human actions in the balances of justice. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed," 1 Sam. ii. 3. And he rewards the good and punishes the bad, in some instances, even in the present world.

2. He is the judge of *all the earth*. Human judges are limited in their proceedings, and the number on whom they sit in judgment is very small; but every man, in every nation, is judged by the Lord. He "searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts," 1

Chron. xxviii. 9. He is omnipotent, and every person in our world is fully known to him, both in his heart and in his life.

3. And he will finally judge the world in the last great day, "by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," Acts xvii. 31. That judgment will be solemn, grand, awful, equitable, and final. The dead, small and great, will stand before God; the books will be opened; and all will be judged according to their works, Rev. xx. 12.

II. IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DOETH RIGHT.

1. There is nothing wrong in any voluntary action, but what may be traced up to the following principles: it proceeds, in all instances, either from ignorance or from wickedness. If we study the causes of wrong-doing for ever, we shall not discover any other than these; but neither the one nor the other ever was, or ever will be, found in the Judge of all the earth.

2. He cannot do wrong for want of knowing better. Speaking after the manner of men, all things, whether past, present, or future, are fully known to him. "There is no searching of his understanding," Isa. xl. 28. He is God, and there is none like him, "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done," Isa. xlv. 10.

3. He is perfectly holy, and cannot do wrong from any evil principle. "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee," Ps. v. 4. And can such a Being depart from the rules of justice and equity? Is it possible for him to oppress or injure any of his creatures? Viewing his infinite wisdom, and his transcendent purity, we are constrained to say, *He cannot do wrong.*

4. He doth what is right to men, in all their temporal affairs. Their poverty or wealth, their health or sickness, their honour or disgrace, their rewards or punishments, in the present state of things, are adjusted by those rules which are fit and right; and though we cannot, in many cases, discover the reasons of the divine proceedings; yet, in every thing which he either permits or appoints, we know he is

doing what is right : for "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," Ps. xcvi. 2.

5. The Judge of all the earth doth right to men in all their spiritual concerns. All men fell in Adam, and all have been redeemed by Christ. "He is the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world," 1 John ii. 2. Divine grace hath appeared to all in one way or another, Tit. ii. 11. And all men may be saved through the merit and mediation of Jesus. On this ground we are required to pray for all men ; "for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto a knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

6. And the Lord will do right in the eternal rewards and punishments of men ; every one will be either acquitted or condemned in the day of judgment, on the strictest principles of righteousness and justice ; and every one will go to his own place, and stand in his lot, Dan. xii. 13. This is clearly revealed in the holy Scriptures, and will be verified when the Lord appears in judgment ; "for he cometh to judge the earth ; with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity," Ps. xcvi. 9.

III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THIS IMPORTANT SUBJECT.

1. Pious men, of widely different sentiments on the purposes and decrees of God, meet on this ground, and, while they sincerely acknowledge that the Judge of all the earth doth right, may cordially embrace each other in the arms of Christian love. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly to himself," Ps. iv. 3. This implies an election ; but it is an election which is fit and right. "Know ye not your own selves, how that Christ Jesus is in you, except ye be reprobates," 2 Cor. xiii. 5. By this passage we learn that there are persons who are reprobates, or rejected ; but this reprobation is just and equitable.

2. While we are piously impressed with the great truth, that the Judge of all the earth doth right, we shall submit ourselves to him, in all the varying circumstances of life. We may wonder why the righteous suffer, and why the wicked prosper ; but we shall ever say with Moses, The Lord is "a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he," Deut. xxxii. 4.

3. We should walk before the Judge of all the earth with circumspection, carefully avoiding every thing that is offensive in his sight, and steadily pursuing those things which he approves. All our works should be wise and good; for he will "bring every work to judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil," Eccles. xii. 14.

4. While we conduct ourselves on this plan, and at the same time rely on the merits of Christ for salvation, we may safely leave all our affairs in the hands of our Judge. He will manage our concerns with unerring wisdom, and unchangeable goodness, so that no evil shall come nigh unto us, nor shall the wicked triumph over us. For "who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" 1 Pet. iii. 13.

5. This is matter of great joy to holy men. They may be accused and slandered, but God will vindicate their character; and they may suffer with Christ, but they shall also reign with him. He says, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," Rev. ii. 10. That crown will be given by the righteous Judge, to "all them that love his appearing," 2 Tim. iv. 8.

6. But this subject is truly awful and alarming to the wicked. They may be suffered to prosper in this world. There are weighty reasons for this in the divine mind; but they stand in slippery places, and ere long will be cast down into destruction. The Psalmist, on viewing their wretched end, exclaimed, "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment; they are utterly consumed with terrors!" Ps. lxxiii. 19. May we ever stand accepted in the sight of our Judge, and when he comes in glory to call the nations to his bar, may we hear him say, "Well done." Amen.

SIGMA.

IV. JACOB'S CHARACTER.

GEN. XXXII. 10.

"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands."

THE inspired history of the patriarch Jacob cannot fail to interest and profit every enlightened and pious reader. In this and the preceding chapter, we find him placed in very peculiar circumstances, which eminently tried the genuineness of his faith and piety. Having been long oppressed by Laban, his father-in-law, he separated from him under the divine direction ; who commanded him to return to the land of his fathers. But Laban speedily pursued him in anger, and unjustly accused him of folly and theft, though he had faithfully served him for twenty years, ch. xxxi. 28, 30, and 41. And no sooner was he delivered from this trial, than another awaited him. Being informed that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men, and supposing his intentions were hostile, Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. In this perplexing situation, he wisely divided his company into two bands, and piously committed his cause into the hands of God, by humble confidence and fervent prayer. The text forms a part of his devotion, on this interesting occasion ; "I am not worthy," &c. In these words Jacob specifies,

I. THE ESTIMATE WHICH HE FORMED OF HIS OWN CHARACTER ; "I am not worthy of the least of the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed thy servant." This is no unimportant distinction. The venerable patriarch regarded himself as entirely consecrated to the God of his fathers. He was intimately acquainted with him—reconciled unto him—actuated by his grace—governed by his will—and devoted to his service. He therefore confidently claims this honourable relation to Jehovah, and humbly pleads before him as his obedient servant. This acknowledgment implies,

1. *He was a believer in God.* He fully believed in his existence and perfections, and piously revered his name as the

Creator and Governor of the Universe, Heb. xi. 6. He faithfully credited the covenant which God made with Abraham and his posterity, when he assured him that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, ch. xvii. 1—8. He was also favoured with special revelations and precious promises, which he joyfully embraced by faith, and prophetically announced the coming of the Messiah, ch. xlix. 10. This principle influenced every part of his conduct, and taught him to “endure, as seeing Him who is invisible.” By faith he lived as the approved servant of God, and in faith he died, waiting for his promised salvation, ch. xlix. 18.

2. *He was a worshipper of God.* Various instances of his devotion are recorded by the sacred historian, ch. xxxii. 11, 12. The text and the context contain an excellent prayer for protection and deliverance, in a time of particular trouble. But the most remarkable display of his devotional spirit appears when he wrestled with the angel of the Lord. On that remarkable occasion he was eminently imbued with the spirit of grace and supplication. And his humble, fervent, believing, and persevering prayer was not in vain. And, as a token of the divine approbation, he was henceforth called *Israel*, for, “as a prince, he had power with God, and prevailed,” v. 24—28. In this happy state of mind, he had also finished his earthly pilgrimage, and died as he lived, a worshipper of the true God, Heb. xi. 21.

3. *He was a follower of God.* Like Noah, he walked with God, and found grace in his sight. He followed the Lord fully, and had respect unto the recompense of reward. His faith was a principle of obedience, and happily produced uniformity of character through all the vicissitudes of his eventful life. When God commanded him to return to his native land, notwithstanding the inconvenience of the journey and the opposition of Laban, like a faithful servant, he promptly obeyed the divine injunction, ch. xxxi. 3, 17, and 18. Such is religion still, and such are all its devoted subjects. They believe the truth of God, and “serve him in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life.” This was manifestly the exalted character of Jacob, the servant of the Lord, who humbly expresses in the text,

II. HIS GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS :—“All the mercies, and all the truth,” &c. In

this pious retrospection of the Lord's kind dealings with him, he devoutly specifies the estimable blessings with which he was so singularly favoured. According to this representation,

1. *They were abundant mercies*;—"All the mercies which thou hast shewed thy servant."—Mercies of providence and grace; individual, domestic, and political mercies. Creating, redeeming, pardoning, renewing, comforting, and preserving mercies. But all language fails to describe the immense magnitude of the Lord's tender mercies to his beloved people. They are innumerable, ineffable, and everlasting. Jacob was deeply affected with these things, and greatly extolled the goodness of God unto him.

2. *They were increasing mercies*. They surrounded him in his infancy and youth, and continued to follow him through every subsequent period of his life. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan," when he first left his father's house. He was then poor and destitute, and could probably boast of no worldly property, but the staff that supported his weary steps. But the Lord was with him, and loaded him with benefits. And when he returned to Canaan, he was blest, not only with flocks and herds, but a numerous and lovely family, and gratefully declared, "I am now become two bands." Divine mercies increase with our necessities, and are incessant in their bestowment, Ps. xxiii. 6.

3. *They were covenant mercies*. Hence he says, "All the truth which thou hast shewed thy servant;" evidently referring to the covenant which he had made with Abraham and his descendants. This covenant of mercy contained many promises, both of temporal and spiritual blessings; and was "ordered in all things and sure." As a believer, therefore, Jacob received all mercies as tokens of his covenant relation with God; and regarded them as special confirmations of the truth of its promises. And all the spiritual seed of Abraham "are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ," by virtue of the new and everlasting covenant of grace, Micah vii. 20; Heb. viii. 8—12. Under a deep sense of our obligations to God, we may unite with the patriarch in declaring,

III. HIS CONSCIOUS UNWORTHINESS OF SUCH PECULIAR BLESSINGS; "I am not *worthy* of the least of all the mercies:" or rather, "I am *less* than all the compassions, and

than all the faithfulness, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

1. *This is the language of conscious dependence.* Jacob did not attribute his prosperity to his own wisdom or goodness, but to the unmerited mercy and blessing of God. The property which he possessed was divinely given him, in the use of appointed means, and was the result of the Lord's special kindness to his distinguished servant. He therefore did not regard himself as the absolute *proprietor*, but merely as the steward of his possessions, and utterly unworthy of such an important trust. All rational beings are invariably dependent on God, and accountable unto him, Acts xvii. 28.

2. *This is the language of grateful recollection.* The pious patriarch devoutly called to mind his former state of poverty and trouble, and the compassionate dealings of God with him in his subsequent years. He evidently saw that goodness and mercy had followed him in every step; and that the truth of the divine covenant secured him every blessing. The remembrance of these things deeply affected his heart, and inspired him with lively gratitude and humble admiration. We should frequently retain in our minds the conduct of God towards us, and gratefully acknowledge our obligations to him, Ps. ciii. 1—5.

3. *This is the language of deep self-abasement.* Jacob was greatly humbled under a lively sense of God's infinite compassion towards him, and his utter unworthiness of such unparalleled favours. He contrasts the magnitude of the divine goodness with his own comparative insignificance and meanness; and declares, in the deep humility of his soul, "I am not *worthy*, I am *less* than the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." How amiable is this disposition; it is the characteristic distinction of all the righteous, Gen. xviii. 27; 1 Chron. xvii. 16, 17; Eph. iii. 18; 1 Pet. v. 5.

We may infer,

1. The design and advantage of Scripture biography, Rom. xv. 4.

2. The duty of imitating the piety of the primitive saints, Heb. vi. 12. And,

3. The necessity of cultivating a spirit of humility and gratitude, James iv. 10.

V. THE GREAT SIGHT.

EXODUS III. 3.

“And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.”

‘THE proper study of mankind is man.’ And it is scarcely possible to find a man whose character is drawn with greater circumstantiality of detail in the volume of inspiration, and whose life we can study to greater advantage, than that of Moses. Who can seriously contemplate the peculiar circumstances of his birth—his deliverance from the fatal effects of a bloody edict, which condemned all the male children of the Hebrews to death—the cultivation of his talents under the auspices of those who were labouring to extirpate his whole nation—and, above all, the mighty signs and wonders which God wrought by him in Egypt, and in the wilderness, without being struck with the peculiarity of his character, and instructed by the wonderful events in his history. To a new era in his life the text directs our attention: in the preceding verse we read, “Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian,” &c. Midian was a city in that part of Arabia which is called Petrea, in consequence of its rocky aspect. Jethro was a priest of Midian; he had seven daughters, to one of whom Moses had allied himself by marriage, and had now submitted to the quiet but exposed occupation of a shepherd; and, having the charge of the flock of his father-in-law, he led it to the “backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to *Horeb*.” What is here called *Horeb*, is called by Stephen, *Sinai*, Acts vii. 30. *Horeb* and *Sinai* were two tops of the same mountain, which circumstance accounts for their being so frequently named the one for the other. “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed; and Moses said, I will now turn aside,” &c. We will notice,

I. THE OBJECT WHICH PRESENTED ITSELF TO THE ATTENTION OF MOSES. A bush that burned with fire, but was not consumed. The bush was designed as a figurative representation of the Jewish church. God has always had a church in the world. In times of the greatest persecution, when vice and wickedness have obtained the greatest triumphs, there have always been a few who have been on the Lord's side, and confessed his name in the face of a frowning world. The Jewish church might have been represented by a bush to illustrate,

1. *The mean and contemptuous ideas which the world entertained of it.* What can be more mean and grovelling than a bush? especially a bramble bush, for such critics say the word imports! God's church is variously represented. Sometimes by the boldest figures, and in the most exalted language. The mountain of the Lord's house, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, God's husbandry, God's building, God's heritage, &c. But, while the saints are described on the one hand as the excellent of the earth, to evince how God regards them, they are also represented as "the filth of the world," to show how men despise them. Thus "the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter," Lam. iv. 2. Let us not think it strange if men despise us; "the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Christ was regarded as a tender plant, and a root out of dry ground, as having no form nor comeliness, Isa. liii. 2.

2. *The bush burned with fire.* Fire was emblematical of the divine presence. There is nothing in nature like God; therefore all representations of the Deity, by figures or pictures, are odious and profane: "Ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire," Deut. iv. 15. But God has revealed himself to men by fire and in the midst of fire; at the giving of the law, the glory of God was "like devouring fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of all the children of Israel," Exod. xxiv. 17. See Dan. vii. 10; Deut. xxxii. 22; Heb. xii. 29. *The fire in the bush was also emblematical of the afflicted state of the Jewish church.* Fire is an emblem of persecution. "I am come," saith Christ, "to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be

already kindled?" Luke xii. 49. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial," &c., 1 Pet. iv. 12. The persecutions of the church resemble fire: First, Because of the painfully acute feelings excited by them. What torment can the flesh sustain equal to fire? And how painful have the persecutions of the church been! How painful to the mind to be scorned, and hated, and insulted wrongfully! How painful to the body to be scourged, stoned, sawn asunder, &c., Heb. xi. 37. How painful were the persecutions of Israel in Egypt! "I know their sorrows, saith the Lord, I have seen their afflictions, and have heard their crying." Secondly, Because of their beneficial and purifying efficacy. Metals are purified by passing through the fire. God overrules the wrath of men for his own glory and his people's good. The fires of persecution serve to purify the saints. "I will bring a third part through the fire," &c., Zech. xiii. 9; 1 Pet. i. 7, 8.

3. *The bush was not consumed.* The children of Israel were not consumed by the cruel and oppressive treatment of their enemies; "They increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty, and the land was filled with them," and the more their enemies afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. Men may persecute the saints, but they cannot destroy them. God's church is built on an immoveable basis, and neither men nor devils can prevail against it. Let us notice,

II. THE PURPOSE OF MOSES ON THIS OCCASION:—"I will now turn aside," &c.

1. *This purpose was the result of peculiar excitement.*—He had seen a great sight. Considered as a mere natural representation, it merited this epithet—a bush on fire, amidst a desert, where no human means were visibly employed to enkindle it, and a bush unburnt amidst the flames. Fire naturally consumes the substance upon which it feeds; and why the bush was not burnt, excited the astonishment of Moses. Considered symbolically, it was a great sight. God was in the bush, ver. 2. It is said, "the angel of the Lord appeared," &c., ver. 4. "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush." This angel, or messenger of Jehovah, was most probably the second person in the ever blessed Trinity; the same who conducted the Israelites in the wilderness, who was Christ Jesus the Lord. See 1

Cor. x. 4. How wonderful, that He whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, should appear in a bush! It was a great sight, figuratively — that the church should flourish amidst all the efforts made to destroy it—that the blood of the martyrs should be the seed of the church.

2. *This purpose was instantly carried into effect* :—" I will now turn aside," &c. Moses had the flock of his father-in-law in his keeping; but he turns off his attention from his fleecy charge, to view the great sight. There are seasons when worldly avocations must be abandoned to attend to the superior calls of piety. God's visitations are too frequently disregarded; he " speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Moses was prompt in turning aside, to examine what seemed to him so extraordinary. Many a pious purpose is blighted in the bud for want of being immediately carried into effect, Eccl. ix. 10.

3. *This purpose was crowned with success* ;—" When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush," &c. Had this great sight been treated by Moses with careless neglect, or had he fearfully turned from, instead of turning towards it, the purpose for which it was exhibited would most probably have been unsuccessful. But when Moses turned aside, God called to him. The bush becomes vocal, as well as brilliant, and he hears " Moses, Moses!" distinctly and divinely announced. The Lord then proceeded to reveal to him the designs of this manifestation. He first admonished him to approach with reverence; then informed him who it was that spoke to him; and lastly, instructed him in the subject of the great deliverance which should be wrought out for Israel, and the distinguished part which he was called to take, in accomplishing that deliverance.

From the whole we infer,

1. *That divine manifestations are not exclusively confined to religious assemblies.* In all places where God records his name, there he will bless his people, Exod. xx. 24. But he revealed himself to Moses in a desert.

2. *That divine manifestations are not regulated by any established rules.* He revealed himself to Jacob in a dream, Gen. xxviii. 12. To Elijah by a still small voice, 1 Kings xix. 12. But to Moses in a burning bush.

3. *That divine manifestations demand peculiar attention.*

When God calls, some refuse to hear, but Moses called off his attention from his accustomed avocations, and said, "I will now turn aside," &c.

4. *That divine manifestations are all subservient to the advancement of God's glory, in the salvation of his people:—* "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever." Amen.

BETA.

VI. THE CERTAINTY OF BEING FOUND OUT BY OUR SINS.

NUMBERS XXXII. 23.

"Be sure your sin will find you out,"

1. THESE words were addressed to certain Israelites, at a time when they were under some temptation to omit their duty towards their brethren. The persons addressed were the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, who were highly obligated to their brethren for assisting them to take possession of their inheritance; who were now called to assist those tribes in return, by uniting with them to invade the Canaanites; but who were tempted to withhold their promised and expected assistance, that they might preserve their own domestic comforts.

2. The design of Moses in thus addressing them, was to counteract this temptation. This he does by shewing them—their sin, if they now withheld their aid, because thereby they would act unnaturally, by forsaking their brethren when in danger; unjustly and ungratefully, by refusing to repay past kindnesses; and treacherously, by omitting to fulfil solemn engagements. And their punishment; which

he assures them will certainly follow their crimes. "Be sure your sin," or the punishment due to your sin, "will find you out." Hence we are instructed to observe,

I. THAT SIN IS JUSTLY CHARGEABLE ON THOSE WHO PRACTISE IT; for transgression is called their sin. Here let us consider,

1. *What sin implies.* It is a transgression of God's law; for "sin is the transgression of the law," 1 John iii. 4. God's law, in his word, requires—Piety: including love, obedience, and stedfast adherence to God, Deut. xxx. 20. Benevolence: including justice, mercy, and truth towards mankind, Eph. v. 9. And purity: including temperance, sobriety, and chastity, with respect to ourselves, Tit. ii. 12. Men sin therefore by acts of impiety, as profaneness, Exod. xx. 7; impenitence, Ps. cvii. 10, 11; and apostacy, Jer. ii. 19. They sin by acts of immorality: by injustice, 1 Cor. vi. 9; by unmercifulness, James ii. 13; and falsehood, Lev. xix. 11. They sin by acts of intemperance: of gluttony, Philip. iii. 18, 19; of drunkenness, 1 Cor. vi. 10; and of unchastity, 1 Cor. vi. 9. Having noticed what sin implies, let us consider,

2. *How it appears justly chargeable on those who practise it.* This is evident, because they are without excuse. They cannot plead ignorance, for God declares his will to mankind, by his works, Rom. i. 20; by his word, Mic. vi. 8; by his servants, Dan. ix. 9, 10; and by their own consciences, Rom. ii. 14, 15. They cannot plead necessity, for they choose sin, when they might have rejected it, Prov. i. 29—31; Isa. lxv. 12; they yield to sin, when they might have resisted it, Heb. xii. 4; and they persist in sin, when they might have been saved from it, Jer. vi. 16; Matt. xiii. 15. They cannot plead interest, because the practice of holiness is the truest interest of mankind; as it is attended with the most extensive good, 1 Tim. iv. 8, and it preserves from the greatest evil, Prov. xix. 23. Hence let us observe,

II. THAT THE PUNISHMENT DUE TO SIN IS CERTAIN TO THOSE WHO PERSIST IN IT. Here observe,

1. *Those who are exposed to punishment;*—the sinners who persist in sin. Not those who renounce their sin, (Ezek. xviii. 27,) but those who persevere in their evil courses, Prov. xxii. 3; Ps. lxxviii. 21. Whether they per-

sist through vicious inclinations, self-righteous pride, or careless delay, continuance in sin must be attended with punishment, Rom. ii. 8, 9. Hence observe,

2. *The punishment due to sin.* This comprises—the curse of God, Gal. iii. 10;—the terrors of death, Prov. xiv. 32; Job xviii. 18;—the torments of a separate state, Luke xvi. 23, 24;—a dreadful resurrection, John v. 28, 29;—banishment from God, Matt. xxv. 41;—and consignment to endless misery, 2 Thess. i. 7—9; Matt. xxv. 46; Dan. xii. 2. This leads us to observe,

3. *The certainty of this punishment.* This evidently appears—from God's judgments on former sinners. Witness those on Achan, Josh. vii. 20, 21, 25; on Adonibezek, Judges i. 6, 7; on David, 2 Sam. xii. 10, 11, 12; and on Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v. 9, 10; Ps. ix. 16, 17;—from God's threatenings, Ps. xi. 6, and l. 21, 22. And from God's perfections, his unerring knowledge to detect offenders, and his almighty power to punish them, Job ix. 4. Observe,

1. *The folly of committing sin in hopes of concealment.* However artfully contrived, variously covered, or unpunished, uncensured, and unsuspected by mortals, Job xxxiv. 21, 22.

2. *The propriety of searching and finding out our sins now, in a way of penitence,* Lam. iii. 40, 41. This constitutes true wisdom, Prov. xxii. 3; and it is encouraged by the promise of mercy, Prov. xxviii. 13.

3. *The happiness of those who are saved from sin.* They feel no guilt, Isa. xii. 1, and they fear no shame, 1 John ii. 28; Isa. xlv. 17.

ALPHA.

VII. A CAUTION AGAINST FORGETFULNESS OF GOD.

DEUT. VIII. 11.

“Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God.”

HAD a book been handed down to us said to be written three or four thousand years ago; written by men who held the first rank in literary and scientific pursuits; and written on the most dignified and interesting subjects which could possibly occupy the attention of the human mind, who is there that would not venerate such a book, and deem it worthy of serious persual and general attention? Such a book is the Bible; its antiquity is demonstrable, the subjects on which it treats are various, but all deeply interesting; many, awfully and mysteriously sublime. Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Paul, and others, were its authors; or rather, its writers, for the Holy Ghost inspired them. With what deep seriousness, therefore, should we search this book, and prepare our hearts to profit by its instructions. The text, though delivered by Moses to the children of Israel thousands of years ago, is addressed to us now; it contains an assumption, an intimation, and a charge.

I. MEN ARE LIABLE TO FORGET GOD. This is the assumption of Moses in the text. And it is a position that needs little confirmation. Were I to make an assertion on this point, and then pass on to the consideration of some other topic furnished by the text, I greatly question whether a single individual in the congregation would call it in question. But as this is a subject which cannot be too deeply impressed upon our minds, we call your attention to the following considerations:

1. *We infer our liability to forget God, from the mysteriousness of his nature.* Things that are near us, that we see and handle, and whose aspect appears familiar, are not easily forgotten; but things that are remote, that we have never seen, and that are very mysterious, are not generally

subjects of our remembrance. No man hath seen God. He is infinitely remote from human comprehension; our ideas of him must necessarily be very imperfect. This is one reason why we are liable to forget him.

2. *We infer our liability to forget God, from the moral dislike we have to him.* Those to whom we have a strong, deep-rooted attachment, we can easily remember; our thoughts cling to them,

“ Thither our warm affections move,
Nor can we call them hence.”

But those whom we dislike we easily forget. Sinners dislike God; there is a contrariety in their natures to God, they are aliens from him, strangers to him, and have enmity in their hearts against him; hence they easily and frequently forget him.

3. *We infer our liability to forget God, from the facts that fall under our notice.* We need not go among pagans and savages to be convinced that men forget God; nor need we penetrate the recesses of licentiousness, or the haunts of vice, so common in various parts of our own country, to satisfy us on the subject. Let each individual turn his attention inwardly, let him examine his own heart. How often is God forgotten by us! we forget his presence. He is always with us, yet how seldom do we think of him!—forget that he will bring us to judgment—forget his mercies—and forget his laws.

4. *We infer our liability to forget God, from the testimonies of the Scriptures.* Read Ps. x. 4; xiv. 1—3; Job xxi. 14, 15; Rom. i. 28.

II. FORGETFULNESS OF GOD IS AN EVIL AGAINST WHICH WE SHOULD BE PECULIARLY ON OUR GUARD. This is the intimation in the text, and the reasons on which it is founded are,

1. *They who forget God must necessarily remain ignorant of him.* Ignorance of God is highly censurable, because man has a capacity for knowing God. The Holy Ghost is given to us, that we may obtain this knowledge. God unites in himself all that is great and good; and he is therefore the most worthy object that we can know; but

those who forget God never can know him ; nothing can be known that is forgotten.

2. *They who forget God must necessarily disobey him.* God has given unto us commandments,—commandments founded in justice, goodness, and truth, which bind us to hate sin, and to love holiness ; and in keeping of which there is great reward. But they who forget God cannot keep his commandments, and disobedience to God is a great curse. Read the terrible threatenings which God denounced against the disobedient Jews, Deut. xxviii. 15—20.

3. *They who forget God must necessarily prove ungrateful to him.* God is our Creator ; to him we are indebted for bodies fearfully and wonderfully made, souls exalted in their natures, and adapted for elevated and eternal enjoyments. God is our benefactor ; he feeds us, clothes us, and defends us. God is our Saviour ; his Son died for us ; his Spirit strives with us ; his gospel encourages us ; his heaven invites us. And does not all this loudly call for returns of gratitude ? But who can be grateful that forgets God ? Is not ingratitude a hateful, execrable crime ?

4. *They who forget God must necessarily be punished by him.* I say necessarily, because God has threatened to punish them ; and it is impossible for God to lie. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God,” Ps. ix. 17 ; Judges iii. 7, 8.

III. MEANS SHOULD BE USED FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF THIS HEINOUS CRIME. This is the object of the charge ; “Beware that thou forget not,” &c.

1. *Serious consideration should be exercised on all the things that belong unto our peace.* Man has a capacity for thought, and a power of turning his thoughts on what objects he pleases ; but alas ! nothing is more lamentable than the extreme thoughtlessness of men concerning their souls, their salvation, and their God. O would you avoid the crime of forgetting God, give yourselves up to serious consideration. “I thought on my ways,” &c. Ps. cxix. 59 ; Deut. xxxii. 29 ; 2 Tim. ii. 7.

2. *Fervent and unremitting prayer should be offered up to God for a change of heart.* Whatever consideration we may exercise, or whatever vows we may make, in reference to our present subject, yet if God does not renew us in the

spirit of our minds, we shall be habitually liable to forget him ; but when he creates a new heart, and renews a right spirit within us, then we shall love God, and delight to think of him. We shall, with David, remember him upon our beds, and meditate on him in the night watches.

3. *We should constantly avoid those things which tend to exclude God from our thoughts.* The expression in the text is emphatic, Beware. — Be wary, cautious, suspicious of danger. Shun all needless association with sinners ; they forget God, and their whole conduct and conversation tend to excite others to forget him. Be not too anxious to augment your worldly property. Nothing conduces more to forgetfulness of God than prosperity. Moses had his eye especially upon this, “ For the Lord thy God,” saith he to Israel, “ bringeth thee unto a good land,” &c., ver. 7. O what a propensity is there to forget God when riches increase !

4. *Let us use all the means which tend to turn our thoughts towards God.* Let us associate with the pious—frequent religious ordinances—read God’s most holy word—contemplate death, judgment, and eternity. In conclusion,

1. Inquire, Do we forget God ? This may serve as a discriminating mark of moral character. Christians love to think of God—sinners strive to forget him.

2. Exhort those who forget God, to consider their folly, their ingratitude, and their danger.

BETA.

VIII. RELIGION NOT A VAIN THING.

DEUT. xxxii. 47.

“ For it is not a vain thing for you ; because it is your life.”

ONE of our poets has compared the exit of a good man to the sun, which seems ‘larger at his setting.’ And never was the remark more fully illustrated and confirmed, than in the character and circumstances of Moses when he delivered the text. He had been great and good through life ; but now his greatness and goodness appeared in higher perfection, and shone with more than usual radiance. The closing scene drew near, his race of peril and glory was just run. He had voluntarily chosen in early life to suffer affliction with the people of God, and now he convenes them together, and delivers in their ears his solemn, his final charge ; a charge which for genuine affection, deep seriousness, grand and elevated sentiment, stern fidelity, and awfully prophetic warnings, has never found a parallel. He rehearses the righteous acts of the Lord—reminds Israel of their rebellions—warns them of their danger—instructs them in their duty, and closes the whole by saying, “ Set your hearts unto all the words,” &c., ver. 46, 47.

We will notice,

I. THE OBJECT TO WHICH MOSES REFERRED ;—“ It is not a vain thing,” &c.

II. THE AFFIRMATION WHICH HE MADE CONCERNING IT ; —“ It is your life.”

I. THE OBJECT TO WHICH MOSES REFERS. This is stated in ver. 46, “ Set your hearts unto all the words,” &c. Two things are included in these words, viz. personal and family religion. Israel were to set their hearts to do all the words of the law themselves, and then command their children to do them. There were many laws, or commandments, which Moses received from God, and delivered unto Israel, with which we have nothing to do. Some were ceremonial, relating to the peculiar mode of Jewish worship. Others were judicial, referring to the administration of justice

among them. But the moral law, which was amplified in the ten commandments, and epitomised in those well-known precepts, "Thou shalt love the Lord," &c., Matt. xxii. 37—39, concerns us as much as it did Israel, and we remark concerning it, that—It is imperative in its nature. "Thou shalt love," &c. We are not lawless beings, left to live at random; nor has God given us a law, and left it optional with us to observe it, or not observe it. But it is imperative upon us; we must do it, or inherit a curse for omitting to do it. It is comprehensive in its requirements. It binds us to love God with all our powers, passions, and affections. Our thoughts, words, and actions, are to be inspired, regulated, and ruled by love. It is universal in its extent. It binds every man, in every clime, and in every station to love God, and to love his neighbour. It is perpetual, and eternal in its obligation. It knows no change by the revolutions of years, it never can be abrogated. Should any inquire how this law is to be kept, Moses will instruct them, "Set your hearts to all the words," &c. Set your hearts to consider the nature of this law. This will instruct you, how utterly impossible it is for you to comply with the requisitions of this law, without renewing grace. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Know the law, and you will know yourselves. Counterfeit coin is best detected by comparing it with that which is genuine.—Set your hearts to pray for that grace which will enable you to love the law of the Lord. Carnal men hate the law, because it is so holy; it allows of no unhallowed pleasures, sanctions no criminal indulgence; but good men have the law of God in their hearts, meditate in that law day and night, and are ready individually to say, "O how I love thy law!" Set your hearts to expect the accomplishment of that promise, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart," Deut. xxx. 6.

Family religion is also enjoined;—"Ye shall command your children to observe to do all the words of this law." Parental duty must be regulated by the law of God. Have you children? Get them to read, to understand, and to do what the Bible enjoins. Parental duty is authorized by the command of God. It is imperative upon parents to command their children, "Ye shall command," &c. Such is the object to which Moses referred. Let us consider,

II. THE AFFIRMATION WHICH HE MADE CONCERNING IT ; —“ It is not a vain thing,” &c. Here are two things to be noticed ; what religion is not, and what it is.

1. *It is not an empty, airy, unsubstantial thing.* For such the word vain frequently signifies. Job calls the months of his affliction “ months of vanity.” Idols are called vanity, and idolaters vain men. Religion is not a vain thing, not a phantom of the brain, not a cunningly devised fable, but a substantial reality that may be felt, tasted, and enjoyed.

2. *It is not a false deceitful thing.* Vain words are false, lying words. Taking the word of God in vain, is using it falsely, as well as unnecessarily. Religion is not a false thing. There are indeed false systems of religion, and lying vanities substituted for religion, but the religion of the Bible is inviolably true ; it emanates from a God of truth ; and it leads to truth in principle and practice. Infidels say it is false, but Christians know it is true.

3. *It is not a foolish senseless thing.* “ Vain man would be wise ;” and ignorant men think religion is folly ; and count the lives of its professors madness. “ The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness,” &c. But religion is the essence of true wisdom ; under its influence we aim at the noblest objects, by the adoption of the most eligible means for securing those objects.

4. *It is not a fruitless unproductive thing.* “ Vain is the help of man.” “ Except the Lord keep the city,” &c., Ps. cxxvii. 1. Religion is universally profitable, Prov. iii. 13 — 18 ; 1 Tim. iv. 8 ; vi. 6.

But the principal reason why it is not a vain thing is, “ It is your life.” To the Jews especially this was applicable, because,

1. *It was the means of prolonging their life.* Long life was promised to them, as the reward of obedience to the law of God. “ Through this thing ye shall prolong your days,” &c. Exod. xx. 12 ; Prov. iii. 16 ; x. 27 ; Ps. xxxiv. 12, 13. And though it may be said, that these promises do not belong to us, yet religion in numberless instances prolongs life, as it saves us from practices which tend to the extinction of life.

2. *It added to the happiness of their life.* God’s design in all the dispensations of his grace is the promotion of human happiness. What a miserable kind of existence is

life without religion; to live under the curse of God, enslaved to the devil, under the dominion of guilt, tormented with fears of hell, and every day fitting for damnation. But what a happy glorious life does that man possess who loves God, and knows that God loves him.

3. *It promoted the utility of their life.* He who lives without religion, lives uselessly. The life of a wicked man is a curse rather than a blessing; and nonentity is preferable to existence, unless the end for which it is given be answered. Religion teaches us to live to be useful. We pray for others—set them good examples—consider the poor, and minister to the necessities of the afflicted.

4. *It prepared them for eternal life.* Heaven is eternal life; not only eternal existence, but endless enjoyment. Religion prepares for this life. He who loves God with all his heart, is a vessel of honour fit for the master's use; and God will ere long receive him into his kingdom to behold his glory.

INFERENCES.

1. *Religion consists in setting your hearts to know and keep the commandments of God.* This will serve to reprove those who place it in frames and feelings, fanciful notions, modes of faith, dreams, visions, raptures, &c.

2. *Religion is not a vain thing.* How awfully do thousands deceive themselves. Some treat it with sovereign contempt. Others profess to know it; but their conduct belies their profession. How vain does it appear in the eyes of multitudes.

3. *Religion is your life.* Then tremble at the thought of living without it. Without it you are dead even while you live. O seek to know, love, and serve God; then you will be 'happy while on earth you live, mightier joys ordained to know.'

BETA.

IX. THE HAPPINESS OF ISRAEL.

DEUT. xxxiii. 29.

"Happy art thou, O Israel."

THESE words were spoken by Moses, the man of God, when he was about to die. The correctness of his statement may be relied on, for he was a faithful writer, and he was well acquainted with the state of Israel. Many foolish persons consider the Israel of God as an abject and dejected people, subject to superstitious fears, and a constant prey to gloomy melancholy ; but this is so far from being the case, that they are the only happy people in the world. But that we may understand this interesting subject, and profit by it, let us consider, first, who are Israelites ; and secondly, wherein this happiness consists.

I. WHO ARE ISRAELITES ?

1. The name took its rise from a memorable transaction in the life of Jacob. He had supplanted Esau, who said, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob." Gen. xxvii. 41. To avoid this, Jacob fled to his uncle Laban, in Padan-aram ; and after remaining with him many years, returned with his family and flocks to the land of Canaan.

2. To appease Esau, and to regain his friendship, Jacob sent messengers before him, and directed them to address him in the most respectful style ; "and the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, we came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him," chap. xxxi. 6. This intelligence produced great fear and distress ; but he did what all wise men should do in similar circumstances : first, he settled his family affairs ; and secondly, betook himself to prayer.

3. And there wrestled with him an angel in a human form. After a mighty struggle, the angel said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh ; and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name ? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name

shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed," verse 26—28. And from that time all his descendants were called Israelites.

4. On that wonderful event, we remark, First, that the person with whom he wrestled was the angel of the covenant, who afterwards became incarnate ; "even the Lord God of hosts ; the Lord is his memorial," Hosea xii. 5. Secondly, that his prevailing was an assurance that he should prevail over his brother. And, Thirdly, that all true Israelites shall ever prevail, both with God and man.

5. But who are Israelites now ? They are persons who have seen their danger as sinners before the Lord ; they have wrestled and prevailed with the Saviour of the world ; they have obtained the blessings of pardon, peace, and holiness. These persons, like Nathaniel, are without guile, John i. 47. They are sincere, humble, and holy ; "and worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," Philippians iii. 3. They are the true circumcision, are in covenant with God, obey his holy precepts, and are on their way to the heavenly Canaan.

6. The ancient Israelites have been cut off for their unbelief and disobedience : but those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do his commandments, are now his peculiar people. He dwells among them, makes their hearts his holy temple, and acknowledges them as his own. The seed of Jacob claim the name of their great ancestor ; but the spiritual seed inherit the blessing.

II. WHEREIN DOES THE HAPPINESS OF ISRAEL CONSIST ?

1. Happiness does not imply an exemption from affliction, for the afflicted are sometimes truly happy. But true happiness implies a calm tranquillity of spirit, a sufficient supply of every necessary blessing, a grateful heart, and a measure of joy and gladness. The causes of happiness are various. We shall point out those which relate to Israel in the days of Moses, and those which relate to all who are now true Israelites.

2. Israel was happy in the great *deliverance* which God had wrought for them, in bringing them out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage ; in allusion to which it is said, " O people saved by the Lord." And all the Israel of God are now happy in a deliverance from the

guilt and power of sin. They were captives, but Jesus has proclaimed "liberty to the captives," Isa. lxi. 1. They are "free from condemnation," Rom. viii. 1. And "sin has no dominion over them," Rom. vi. 14. "Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord," Ps. cxliv. 15.

3. The Israelites were happy in the deserts of Arabia, in a *rich supply of all their wants*. The Lord "had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full," Ps. lxxviii. 24, 25. And Israel is happy now in abundant supply of all their wants. They have sufficient food and raiment, Luke xii. 31. They have the bread of life, John vi. 32. They have the water of life, Rev. xxii. 17. And a holy apostle has said, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Jesus Christ," Phil. iv. 19.

4. They were happy in the protection of Almighty God. "He was the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency." "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms," ver. 27. They had many enemies, but the God of Jeshurun rode upon the heaven in their help, and in his excellency on the sky, ver. 26. And is he not now the defence of his people? Is his arm shortened that he cannot save? Jesus watches over his own, and guards them safely both by night and by day, so that we may ask, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" 1 Pet. iii. 13.

5. They were happy in the special presence of God, and in his holy worship. "A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, Exod. xl. 34. There they worshipped him, and enjoyed high felicity, in humble and devout approaches to his divine Majesty. The church is now happy in the presence of the Lord. He dwells in the midst of the golden candlesticks, Rev. i. 13. And they are happy in his worship; for his earthly courts resemble the heavenly, where there is everlasting joy and gladness, Isaiah xxv. 9.

6. But they were happy in the prospect of Canaan, a land of rest, abounding with oil and wine, and flowing with milk and honey. Their enemies set them at defiance; but God said, "They shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt

tread upon their high places." The spiritual Israel have also the promised land in view, the heavenly Canaan, where their present happiness will be perfected for ever, Heb. xi. 16. Canaan was a type of heaven; and as Joshua led the people of Israel into that land, so Jesus will lead us to glory in the eternal world, Heb. ii. 10. Every Christian believer is begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus, "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," 1 Pet. i. 4.

7. How widely different is this happiness from that which the world offers to its deluded votaries! They eat, and drink, and sleep; they follow the fashions and amusements of the world; and they are called happy. But are their hearts at rest? Holy men may be found who are poor, and tempted, and persecuted; but God is their Father, angels are their servants, Jesus is their Saviour, saints are their brethren, and heaven is their home.

INFERENCES.

1. True Israelites should ascribe their salvation to God. They owe every blessing which they enjoy, whether temporal or spiritual, to his goodness and mercy.

2. They should urge their way forward to the holy hill of Zion. There they will enjoy happiness in perfection; and what is best of all, it will be without interruption, and without end.

3. Those who have tasted the pure pleasures of religion, and who are now happy in God, should pity and pray for the world which lieth in wickedness. God has done much for them, and has taken them into his holy covenant. Let them do good to all; and may God have the praise, both now and ever. Amen.

SIGMA.

X. PROMPTITUDE OF CHOICE RECOMMENDED.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

“Choose you this day whom you will serve.”

THE text contains a most important piece of advice, addressed to a highly privileged people, by a most distinguished character, on a very memorable occasion. The speaker was Joshua, the successor of Moses, who was invested with his miraculous powers, and high prerogative. The period at which the text was spoken, was when he contemplated the near approach of death; and the individuals to whom it was addressed were the elders of Israel, their heads, their judges, and their officers. There are seasons when the force of truth acquires additional energy; when the time, the place, and the circumstances, combine their influence to give permanency to the impression produced in the mind; and the period before us was one of those occasions. Imagine a venerable old man, grown grey-headed in the service of his God, and in active benevolence for the good of his nation; a man high in repute for his personal prowess, for his uniform and consistent character, for the splendour of his talents, for his disinterested integrity, rehearsing in the ears of the heads of Israel, the wonderful conduct of God towards them, reminding them of their degraded origin, “Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood,” &c., ver. 2. Of the plagues inflicted on Egypt for their sakes, ver. 6, 7. How God defeated the design of Balaam, who came to curse the people, but was constrained to bless them altogether, ver. 9, 10. And he also reminded them of what God had done for them since they inhabited the land of Canaan. “Now, therefore,” said he, “fear the Lord,” &c., “and if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you,” &c. Three things we will notice—the act, the period, and the motives for choice.

I. LET US NOTICE THE ACT OF CHOICE.

1. *Our choice should be divine in its object.* We should

choose the Lord for our God. Choose God for our sovereign, that he may govern us, and that we may submit to his authority and dispensations. For our guide, that he may direct us amidst all the intricate snares of this world. For our husband, that we may be married to him. For our portion, that we may be satisfied with his favour; and for our pattern, that we may imitate him. O how many choose other objects!

2. *Our choice should be rational in its character.* It should be the result of rational conviction: the religion of some people lies solely in their passions; their hearts have been affected, their passions touched, and without counting the cost, or calling in the aid of their intellectual faculties, they commence their religious course, and join some body of professing Christians; but alas! when persecution comes, they are offended, and their profession vanishes as the morning cloud, and as the early dew. Let us wisely consider what we are doing, so that we may be able to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us.

3. *Our choice should be decisive in its nature.* In reference to many things in human life, we are called upon to hesitate in making our choice; and after we have made it, we are left in doubt as to its result. "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" But this cannot be the case, in reference to the subject before us. We all know that if we do not choose God for our portion, we must be inevitably ruined; and under the influence of this conviction, we should be so decided in our choice, as not even to have a longing wish for the world, or a single thought of returning again to its vain pursuits in quest of happiness.

4. *Our choice should be practical in its operations:—* "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Having chosen God, you must serve him—totally, with soul and body; uniformly, not merely on the Sabbath, or among the friends of piety, but always, and every where; consistently evince that you serve him. "Let others see your good works."

II. LET US NOTICE THE PERIOD OF OUR CHOICE;—
"Choose you this day," &c.

1. *We should make our choice this day, because of the criminal neglect of which we have been guilty.* As soon as

reason dawned upon our minds, and we were capable of making a choice, we ought to have chosen God for our portion, and to have been uniform in our attachment to him, from that time to the present. But the days of our youth passed away in the total neglect of God; we purposed when arrived at maturity to choose the good part; but alas! here also many of us failed, and now some of us are old, and probably have never yet been decidedly pious. O what culpable neglect attaches to us!

2. *We should make our choice this day, from a view of the shortness and uncertainty of our time.* 'Time is short,' our days are as an hand-breadth, swifter than a post. We may die to-day, our departure may be sudden. Death often gives no signal of his approach, but should we have a lingering affliction, that is not a proper time to choose whom we shall serve.

3. *We should make our choice this day, because the present is the only time when God has promised the aids of his Spirit.* The power of choice is from God; that power is the effect of his gracious operations in us. But his Spirit will not always strive with us. God may be provoked to give us up to a reprobate mind. "Now is the accepted time."

4. *We should make our choice this day, because the difficulty of choosing will increase in proportion to our neglect of it.* Sin is a disease; the longer that disease prevails, the more inveterate it becomes. Sin is slavery; the longer we continue in it, the faster our chains are riveted, and the more difficult it is to burst them asunder.

III. LET US NOTICE THE MOTIVES FOR CHOICE. Joshua gave this charge to Israel, it is given to us now.

1. *The capacity which we have for choice is a reason for its exercise.* God gives nothing in vain. Had we ranked no higher than brutes, and possessed nothing superior to blind instinct, the power of choice would have been precluded; but we are men, endowed with rational faculties, and capable, under the influence of the divine Spirit, of choosing God, and serving him.

2. *The perilous state in which we are without this choice is another motive.* How miserable is a man without God! He who has never chosen God for his portion, has no interest in him, no union with him, no salvation from him. God is to him no refuge, Christ no Saviour, the Holy Ghost

no comforter : heaven is no inheritance of his ; ruin must inevitably seize his soul, if he continue in a course of sin.

3. *The happiness that results from our choosing God should prompt us to comply with the requisition in the text.* He who has chosen God is in a state of safety and tranquillity. His guilt is pardoned, his soul is renewed, his hope is like an anchor, sure and stedfast, cast within the veil, whither the forerunner is for him entered. The Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Conclude by inquiring, What choice have we made ? Where are our affections placed ? Whom do we serve ? What is our chief good ? Some worship mammon. Some serve the devil. Expostulate with such. Why make such a choice ? The world cannot make you happy. With the devil you will be tormented if you die in sin. Exhort those who have chosen God to cleave to him. Amen.

BETA.

XI. THE CONDUCT OF THE LORD TOWARDS SAINTS AND SINNERS.

1 SAM. ii. 9.

“ He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness .
for by strength shall no man prevail.”

HOLY persons are favoured with the peculiar care and protection of Almighty God at all times, and in all the varying vicissitudes of life. For wise and good reasons he may suffer them to fall into afflictions and temptations, but he will keep them safely in those trials, and deliver them in his own good time. But he is opposed to the wicked, and will punish them, either here or hereafter, unless they repent and turn to him. They now speak against the Lord and his people, but ere long they shall be silent in darkness. They may hope to prevail against pious and holy persons, but no man can prevail, in any evil attempt to injure the

people of God, either by his own strength, or by the united strength of his wicked companions. The words of our text are a part of Hannah's eloquent song, when God had given her a son, who was to be a great prophet in Israel. Her adversary, the other wife of Elkanah, had triumphed over her; but now she triumphs, with a holy triumph, in the Lord her God. Observe,

I. THE LORD WILL KEEP THE FEET OF HIS SAINTS.

1. The word saint signifies a holy one. It is opposed to the word sinner. The saints of God are holy both in heart and life. Their tempers are holy; their conversation is holy; and their works are holy. A sinner, whatever profession he makes, is no saint; and a saint, whatever his infirmities may be, is no sinner. The word is frequently used by way of contempt, and is intended to convey an idea that the saints are precise, formal, conceited, and hypocritical professors; but this arises either from ignorance, or from a hatred of all that is good. That there are such professors of religion we allow, and it is a matter of grief; but they are sinners under a mask, and it is wicked to charge good men with their hateful conduct.

2. Saints are on a journey through this world of sin and sorrow to a better country, Heb. xi. 14—16. The way which they take, by the direction of unerring wisdom, is both difficult and dangerous. Sometimes they find it a slippery path of temptation, Psalm lxxiii. 2. Then they walk in darkness, and have no light, Isa. i. 10. Many snares are laid for their feet by wicked men, who seek their ruin, Psalm xxxviii. 12. And stumbling-blocks are cast in their way, that they may stumble and fall, Rev. ii. 14. In all these circumstances their feet must be kept, that they may stand, and proceed on their journey in perfect safety.

3. The Lord himself keeps their feet. He guides and directs them by his counsel, Psalm lxxiii. 24. When they fall into affliction, he keeps them from falling into sin, Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24. They walk before him under his Almighty protection Gen. xvii. 1. While this is the case, they go from strength to strength, Psalm lxxxiv. 7. Under the care of the Lord, they do not stumble; they do not wander; they do not fall. Their feet are shod with iron and brass, and are kept clean, and sound, and strong, Deut. xxxiii. 25. We are required to ponder the path of our

feet, that our ways may be established, Prov. iv. 26. This is good and necessary, but we cannot see our way without the light of the word, Psalm cxix. 105. Nor can we proceed in it without the help of the Lord.

II. THE WICKED SHALL BE SILENT IN DARKNESS.

1. The wicked are without God in the world, Eph. ii. 12. They walk in the broad way which leadeth to destruction, Matt. vii. 13. We may divide them into two classes; first, those who keep up a fair appearance, but who indulge secret sins; and of whom it may be said, as of the heathen professors, "it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret," Eph. v. 12. Secondly, those who are openly wicked, and who glory in their shame, while they are ashamed of their real glory, Phil. iii. 12. These are drunkards, swearers, and Sabbath-breakers; and by persevering in their sins, they soon become robbers, thieves, and murderers. They sin both in the sight of God and man; for they neither fear God, nor regard men, Luke xviii. 2.

2. These are noisy and clamorous, boasting of themselves, and prone to speak evil of God and religion; but the time is at hand when they shall be put to silence. They will be silent in the grave. "Let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave," Psalm xxxi. 17. But they will be silent in the great day of the Lord, not having a word to say in their own defence, or against the justice of the Judge; nor will they then accuse or reproach the saints of the Most High; but will be like the man who had not on a wedding garment, for he was speechless, Matt. xxii. 12. What a change of circumstances! The boaster is confounded; the self-confident is put to shame; and the persecuting tyrant has not a word to say for himself.

3. Darkness shall encompass them about on every side. They are sometimes brought into darkness in the present world, by the judgments of God. "They shall look unto the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness," Isa. viii. 22. Then they are turned into the grave, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness," Job x. 22. Afterwards, they shall be cast into "outer darkness, there

shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matt. xxii. 13. In that horrid prison they will be without comfort, without a friend, and without hope.

III. FOR BY STRENGTH NO MAN SHALL PREVAIL.

1. Wicked men fight against God and truth, but they cannot prevail. They are weak and impotent, but God is almighty. He could crush the world to dust in a moment, if it pleased him to do so. What, then, is the feeble arm of man? "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth," Isa. xlv. 9. Truth is strong. It has been opposed by heathens, Jews, Turks, and infidels; but they never could prevail, because it has been supported by the arm of Omnipotence. They may continue to rage and imagine vain things, but "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision," Psalm ii. 4.

2. They fight against the church, not only by what they call argument, but by secret and open persecution. Their attacks have been frequent, violent, and cruel; but they never could prevail, and they never will prevail, because the church is built upon a rock, Matt. xvi. 18. Superstition, bigotry, and wild fanaticism, must fall; but the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, for it is a kingdom which cannot be moved, either by secret or open foes, Heb. xii. 28. The ark is safe without the support of an Uzzah, 2 Sam. vi. 6. We fear greatly when the wicked are in power, but 'God is above men, devils, and sin.'

3. Pious individuals are frequently attacked by the wicked, but they cannot prevail. Hell may rage against them; the children of the wicked one may plot their ruin; but God is their strong hold in the day of trouble, Nah. i. 7. Did Goliath prevail against David? Did the enemies of Daniel prevail? Did Peninnah prevail against Hannah? Did Ahab prevail against Elijah? Carefully examine the deliverances which God wrought for those worthies, and take courage, for with him there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," James i. 17.

INFERENCES.

1. God has his saints on earth. They are but few in number, when compared to the great bulk of mankind; but

they will be many when the wickedness of the wicked comes to an end, Psalm vii. 9.

2. The saints are safe. While they retain holy principles, and engage in holy practices, no power can prevail against them; for God, who is perfectly holy, will safely keep his obedient children.

3. But the wicked are in awful circumstances. While they are opposed to God, he is opposed to them; and if they die in their present state, they will be ruined for ever. O may they now repent, return, and live! Amen.

SIGMA.

XII. DAVID'S CHARGE TO SOLOMON.

1 CHRON. xxviii. 9.

“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”

THESE words contain advice given to a hopeful son by an excellent father, under very affecting circumstances.

1. *Advice given to a hopeful son.* This Solomon certainly was,—As the object of God's distinguished favour; being chosen by God to govern his people, ver. 5, and interested in God's promises of fatherly regard and protection, ver. 6, 7,—And as eminent for wisdom and piety. See 2 Chron. i. 7—12. Now the interest of a son so hopeful must needs lie near a parent's heart: and that David felt this is incontestable; for it may be justly affirmed that this advice was given,

2. *By an excellent father.* He evidently excelled—in paternal affection. This he abundantly manifested in his conduct towards Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, as well as Solomon. In this he was rather excessive than defective.—In experience. He had witnessed almost all the possible vicissitudes of human life. He had been the subject

of great honour and dishonour. He had known how to abound, and how to suffer the want of all things. He had been conversant with the most lovely, and the most detestable of mankind. He had most exquisitely felt both the bitter effects of sin, and the consolations of piety. Hence he must have been well qualified to impart the best counsel.—He also excelled in knowledge; being under the guidance of God's unerring Spirit, 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. This counsel was given,

3. *Under most affecting circumstances.* When David was preparing to resign his earthly honours—about to appear before his heavenly Judge—and must soon be rendered incapable of giving farther advice. Being the dying counsel of such a father to such a son, it must be highly important, and worthy of our serious attention. “And thou, Solomon my son, know thou,” &c. In these words we find a course of acceptable piety most powerfully urged. Let us therefore observe,

I. THE COURSE PRESCRIBED;—“Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him,” &c. In fulfilling this course we are required,

1. *To know God*;—“Know thou,” &c. This command implies—That mankind by nature do not know God, Ps. xiv. 2, 3; Jer. ix. 3. They do not understand God's relations to mankind, as their rightful sovereign; their guide in difficulties; their Redeemer from evil; and their friend in necessities, Ps. x. 4. They do not acknowledge God in these relations. They neither bow to his authority, Exod. v. 2; Isa. i. 2, 3; nor attend to his guidance, Jer. vi. 16; nor accept his salvation, John iii. 19; nor confide in his friendship, Zeph. i. 12. They do not enjoy God in these relations, Eph. ii. 12. That the knowledge of God must be sought to be enjoyed. This appears from the command, “Know thou the God of thy father;” and from the promise, “If thou seek him, he will be found of thee.” Seek therefore the knowledge of God—by searching the Scriptures, which testify of him, John v. 39. And by acknowledging God in his relations, Prov. iii. 6. In so doing—Resign yourselves to his direction as your guide; by taking his word as the rule of your faith and practice, Ps. cxix. 128.—Devote yourselves to him as your sovereign, Rom. vi. 13. Apply to him as your redeemer, for salvation from all sin,

by repentance, affiance, and importunate prayer, Hos. xiv. 1, 2, 3. And habitually confide in him as your friend, as your all-sufficient friend, Gen. xvii. 1; and your unchangeable friend, James i. 17. In fulfilling this course we are required,

2. *To serve God with a perfect heart and a willing mind.*—Serve him, by persevering attention to his guidance, Acts iii. 22, 23, Heb. xii. 25; by habitual dependence on Christ's mediation, Col. ii. 6; by stedfastly resisting Satan, 1 Pet. v. 8, 9; by aspiring after spotless purity, 2 Cor. vii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 14; and by doing good to mankind for God's sake, Gal. vi. 10; Rom. xiv. 17, 18.—Serve him with a perfect heart; with firm resolution to serve God alone, Matt. iv. 10; and with constant care to please God in all things, Matt. vi. 22; 1 Cor. x. 33. Serve the Lord with a willing mind; from a principle of grateful affection, Rom. xii. 1; and in cheerful hope, 1 Pet. i. 13.

3. *Thus to know and serve God may be justly denominated a course of acceptable piety.* It is acceptable piety; in opposition to the complimentary piety of the antinomian, for it includes actual service; to the affected piety of the hypocrite, for it includes sincerity of heart; to the erroneous piety of the superstitious, for it includes service directed by the knowledge of God; and to the servile piety of the Pharisee, for it includes service cheerfully rendered. It is a course of piety; in opposition to the inconstant pious intervals of unstable professors, Hos. vi. 4. That we may fulfil this course of acceptable piety, let us observe,

II. THE ARGUMENTS BY WHICH IT IS URGED. These are deduced,

1. *From the knowledge of God as our observer.*—"For the Lord searcheth all hearts." This implies,—That all our deportment is exposed to God's inspection: all our thoughts, and consequently all our words and ways, Ps. cxxxix. 2—4. That he actually requires holy service, arising from pure motives; for he understandeth the imaginations of the thoughts, 1 Sam. xvi. 7; 1 Chron. xxix. 17. We must serve God sincerely, or be doomed to infamy, Isa. xxxiii. 14.

2. *From his goodness as our Redeemer.* This is manifested—In his past kindness. He is the God of thy father, his guide, his guardian, and his benefactor, Ps. lxxxiv. 11; and as he is no respecter of persons, all who serve him

may hope in him, Rom. x. 12; Lam. iii. 24.—In his benevolent instructions. He informs us what he requires of us, with the most gracious design; he calls us to know him, that we may enjoy him; and to serve him, that we may be blessed by him, Isa. xlv. 19.—And in his faithful promise. He will be found of thee. This is his engagement, and will be fulfilled, Numb. xxiii. 19; it is his purpose, and none can frustrate it, Dan. iv. 35.

3. *And from his just severity as our Judge.*—"If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." This teaches us,—That God our Judge cannot be imposed on: for he knows and scrutinizes all our conduct, 1 Sam. ii. 3; Prov. xvi. 2; Eccl. xii. 14. That forsaking God is highly resented by him: as implying ingratitude, treachery, and folly, Jer. ii. 13, 19.—And that apostacy from God is justly punished with eternal banishment from him. Compare Job xxi. 14, with Matt. xxv. 41.

APPLICATION.

1. *You must serve God on earth, or you cannot live with him in heaven,* Matt. vii. 21.

2. *That you may serve God acceptably, you must first know him,* Exod. v. 2.

3. *The knowledge of God should be restlessly and confidently sought,* Prov. ii. 3—5; Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

ALPHA.

XIII. EARLY PIETY EXEMPLIFIED IN JOSIAH.

2 CHRON. xxxiv. 3.

"While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father."

It was the observation of an inspired apostle, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many

noble, are called." God's people have generally been an afflicted and a poor people; "the poor have the gospel preached to them," and "God hath chosen the poor in this world, to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised unto them that love him." But the individual exhibited to our view in the text, was differently circumstanced. He was a king, and sat upon a throne, and reigned over a great people; and though many acts of his life are inimitable by us, yet in the view in which the text represents him, he is eminently worthy the attention of the junior part of my congregation. We will therefore notice three things,

I. THE OBJECT AFTER WHOM JOSIAH SOUGHT:—"The God of David his father."

II. THE MANNER HOW HE SOUGHT AFTER THAT OBJECT; which will be seen by referring to this chapter.

III. THE PERIOD OF LIFE WHEN HE DID IT:—"While he was yet young," &c.

I. THE OBJECT AFTER WHOM JOSIAH SOUGHT. Josiah sought after the God of David his father. Josiah lived four hundred years subsequently to David, but being David's remote descendant he is considered as his son. Also, when one person imitates another, by a familiar mode of speech, he is represented as his son. Abraham was the father of the faithful. "Ye are of your father the devil, because his works ye do." Josiah imitated David, see ver. 2. God was David's God.

1. *God was David's teacher.* David was a man of extensive information, his knowledge was various; he knew much of God and his works; much of men and things; but he was indebted to God for his instruction. "The Lord is my light," &c., Ps. xxvii. 1. "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies." "I will thank thee, O Lord, who hast given me counsel." David's soul was dark and ignorant by nature, but God instructed and taught him great things out of his law.

2. *God was David's comfort.* He was involved at times in great trouble; he had tasted the wormwood and the gall; the waves and the billows had gone over him; he had experienced personal, family, and national trouble. But he had applied unto God, and was enabled to say, "In

the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." "Bless the Lord, O my soul," &c., Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

3. *God was David's delight.* David seemed totally at a loss to express the ardency of his attachment unto God. "O God, thou art my God," &c., Ps. lxxiii. 1. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks," &c., Ps. xlii. 1, 2. When deprived of the public ordinances of religion, he appeared even to envy the sparrows which made their nests near unto the house of the Lord, Ps. lxxxiv. 3.

4. *God was David's defence.* David had many enemies; they who hated him, he said, "were more than the hairs of his head." "But the Lord," said he, "is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer," &c. "When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back," &c. Thus, Jehovah was the God of David, and after him Josiah sought; but let us describe,

II. THE MANNER HOW HE SOUGHT AFTER GOD. Information on this subject we collect by perusing his history.

1. *He sought God from a deep conviction that his conduct, and the conduct of Israel generally, was highly offensive to God, and that they were exposed to imminent peril.* For in his reign, while they were repairing the temple, they found a copy of the book of the law, and by reading that, and comparing their conduct with it, they saw the criminality of their lives, and that wrath was ready to come upon them. Let us read our Bibles, and compare ourselves with the records of revelation.

2. *He sought God in deep self-abasement of soul.* When he heard the book of the law read, he rent his clothes and wept, see ver. 19, 27. Humility best becomes those who seek the Lord; a view of our sins, a consciousness of danger, a consideration of the majesty and glory of God, all should tend to humble us.

3. *He sought God by destroying the idols out of the land.* Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, had reared up altars for Baalim, made groves, and worshipped the hosts of heaven. And Amon, his father, had worshipped the carved image which Manasseh had made; but Josiah purged the land from idols, ver. 3, 4. Here we cannot exactly imitate him, but we should purge our hearts from idols: every human being is addicted

to idolatry, to love the creature rather than the Creator; but God will have no rival, he will not give his glory to another.

4. *He sought God by restoring his true worship, and frequenting it.* The house of God had been neglected and forsaken, but Josiah got workmen, and builders, and artificers in great numbers, and they repaired the temple; and Josiah restored the passover, and the people celebrated it, "so that there had been nothing like it since the days of Samuel, neither did any of the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept." Here, too, our conduct must necessarily vary a little from that of Josiah's; but those who would seek God, should frequent his public ordinances. These we have in abundance.

5. *He sought God with all his heart.*—"For, like him, there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul," &c., 2 Kings xxiii. 25. Here we must fully imitate Josiah; God demands our hearts, our whole hearts, and we must turn to him heartily, and in the most unreserved and decided manner.

III. THE PERIOD OF LIFE WHEN HE DID IT:—"While he was yet young," &c. "He was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years, and then he began to seek," &c. We should seek God while we are yet young, because,

1. *God is the best object whom we can seek.*—"All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." To whom then will you liken God? Examine all the objects which men are accustomed to seek after, and say which of those objects can be compared with the Lord?

2. *Youth is the best time for seeking God.*—It is the most acceptable time with God: "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." It is the most pleasant time with us. The yoke of Christ is then peculiarly easy, and his burden more than ordinarily light. How hard and difficult it is for old sinners to seek God! It is the only certain time we can command. How few live to see old age. "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble;" thousands die daily: life is but "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Let me then persuade you, young people, to imi-

tate Josiah. Reflect on the advantages attendant on such a mode of conduct. There are personal advantages; seek God, and you will find him,—seek God, and you will live. There are relative advantages; Josiah's conduct stimulated others to seek God, and, perhaps, thousands, and tens of thousands, were benefited by his example. We cannot promise ourselves such extensive usefulness, but we may all be useful in a greater or less degree. How many of you, young people, would gladden your parents by seeking the Lord! How useful might you be to your juvenile companions! But many young persons perceive no necessity for seeking the Lord; but this necessity exists, whether you see it or not. Oh! how awfully are you deceived! Others attach a degree of meanness to this exercise. To such we say, look at Joseph, Samuel, Solomon, Abijah, Daniel, Timothy, &c. But some have suffered the morning of their lives to pass away without seeking God: to such we address a word of exhortation, reproof, and encouragement.

BETA.

XIV. GOD'S CHARACTER OF JOB, AND THE PROTECTION HE AFFORDED HIM.

JOB i. 8—11.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” &c.

SOME look on this book as a mere dramatic performance. Others, and indeed most of the commentators, consider it as real history. It opens with an account of Job's residence, piety, wealth, domestic felicity, and devotion. A figurative

assemblage of the angels is mentioned, at which Satan is said to have been present; and here are recited God's address to Satan, and Satan's reply to him. In directing your attention to these words, we would notice,

I. THE RELATION IN WHICH JOB STOOD TO GOD.—He was God's acknowledged servant: "Hast thou considered my servant Job?"

1. Job was God's servant in the same sense in which every good man is his servant; that he is his purchased property, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. He, therefore, has no right to dispose of himself, Rom. xiv. 7—9. Nor has any one but his lawful master a right to dispose of him, 1 Cor. vii. 22, 23. Much less has the Christian any right to yield obedience unto sin, though it were but for the shortest time, and in the most secret manner, Rom. vi. 4—16. He has presented himself unto God formally and entirely, Rom. xii. 1. He, consequently, does all in the name of the Lord Jesus, Col. iii. 17. And he does all with good will, being deeply sensible of his obligation, Col. iii. 23, 24. We do not say that Job had these perfect views of his obligation growing out of his redemption; but that he had some sight of it is indisputable. And so far as his light extended, so far it influenced him, as it does all good men. But,

2. Job was God's servant in a sense not common to good men; for he appears to have been called, by common consent and reference, to act as a ruler and as a judge among men. An evident reference is made to his magisterial acts, Job xxix. 7—17. And those who in the order of providence are called to fill such situations, are emphatically styled God's servants, Rom. xiii. 4. Let us notice,

II. THE CHARACTER WHICH GOD GAVE HIS SERVANT JOB;—"Hast thou considered," &c. him, "that there is none like him in the earth," &c. This character was not precipitately given, before its subject could be known. Nor was it given by one who knew not Job. Least of all was it given by one who was capable of any unbecoming partiality. In saying there was no one like him in the earth, that is, in the land where he dwelt, it is not said that none had it in his power to be like him. For any thing the history says to the contrary, all in the land might have been like him; and those were blameable that were not so. And surely, we have authority to say that all in this land,

and in this assembly, might be as excellent as he was. But wherein did his excellence consist? why,

1. *In fearing God.* The fear of God is a feeling of the soul, springing from a discernment of the advantages flowing from God's favour, or of the dreadful consequences of falling short of it. This fear will lead us to seek his favour, and to avoid his frown. And to attain our object, we shall be led to reverence and worship God in spirit and truth.

2. *This fear led Job to eschew evil.* To eschew a thing, is to shun it with abhorrence. Job did not eschew evil or sin (which is the thing intended by evil) out of mere caprice. Sin is called evil, because the most pernicious or injurious effects spring from it. Job eschewed all evil in the act, all evil in appearance, and all incitement to evil; and like a watchman on his tower, he observed and examined every object that approached his citadel. But,

3. *He was a perfect man.* This means more than a merely sincere or guileless man, such as Nathaniel, John i. 47. By a perfect man, we intend more than one whose whole nature is sanctified in part but not entirely. Such is not the perfect man of either the New Testament or the Old. The word means any thing finished or complete; Job therefore was a finished or complete man, considering the time in which he lived, and the opportunities he enjoyed; and as he was a perfect, so,

4. *He was an upright man.* This is not to be taken as a merely tautological manner of expression; as the last particular was rather intended to express a *right* or *perfect* state of mind, so this denotes an unblemished conversation. Such was the character of Job, and such should be the character of every good man. No wonder therefore that God should be so mindful of, and so favourable unto him. This leads us to notice,

III. THE PROTECTION WHICH HIS GOD AFFORDED HIM; —“Hast thou not made an hedge about him?” &c. God extended to him an effectual protection; he conferred on him a special blessing, in consequence of which he enjoyed an unusual prosperity.

1. *He extended to him an effectual protection.* This is an allusion to an enclosure which is usually surrounded by a hedge or wall, to answer the purposes of the proprietor. Thus Jehovah surrounded his Jewish vineyard with a fence,

and cleansed and planted it, Isa. v. 1, 2. And when it yielded not fruit to expectation, he threatened to break down its fence, and to suffer it to be eaten up and trodden down of men, Isa. v. 5, 6. Some cities have had a *double*, and some even a *treble* wall or fence; thus was a fence set round Job's person, house, and substance. Sometimes the angels or messengers of God surround his people, Ps. xxxiv. 7. At other times Jehovah himself becomes their guardian, Zech. ii. 5. In some such way he seems to have been Job's defence; for Satan here confesses that the defence of this saint was most complete,—“Hast thou not made an hedge about him? and about *all that he hath*, on *every side*?” So complete was this fence, that there was no access for Satan either to the person, family, or property of Job, but by divine permission. How necessary is it that God should thus surround all his saints, seeing they dwell in the midst of adversaries and dangers. But,

2. To this effectual protection, *God added his special blessing*. God blessed not Job as one creature blesses another, by wishing him a blessing. Nor did he merely bless him as we bless God, by *eulogizing him*. He blessed him by succeeding the works of his hands. This is what we are warranted to expect; for as a good man undertakes all with a view to the divine glory, so Jehovah undertakes to prosper him, Ps. i. 3. Without God's blessing the most flattering means must be abortive, Eccles. ix. 11; Zech. iv. 6. And because God blessed the works of Job's hand, he was,

3. *Made to enjoy unusual prosperity*;—“and his substance is increased in the land.” For a proof of his prosperity, see Job i. 3. And what he had he received from God as a blessing. And Job not only *knew how* to make a good use of his substance, but was disposed to do so. So that his proceedings were not only *honourable*, but *honoured* before God and men. Such in his measure every good man *ought* to be, and *will* be. We observe,

IV. THE MALEVOLENCE AND INVETERACY OF SATAN AS THE ADVERSARY OF GOD'S PEOPLE. In no other way could he injure Job, and therefore he insinuated that his motives for serving God were sinister and selfish. “Doth Job serve God for nought?” Serve him for nought! no, indeed; God is not a hard master, nor yet is he unrighteous

to forget the work of faith which his saints render to him, nor their labour which proceedeth of love. And as God is pledged to reward the services of his people, so are we encouraged to look to his promised recompense, Heb. x. 35. Satan would indeed insinuate that those who look unto this recompense are sinister in their designs : nor Satan only, —for there are others who dare to broach this doctrine ; but our comfort is to know that the word of God affords no countenance unto it. It certainly had no countenance from the conduct of Moses, Heb. xi. 26. Nor yet from that of Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. It would be an unworthy thing for any saint to be actuated merely by the hope of gain in the service of God ; but to be animated by the hope of that which God hath made matter of promise, cannot be improper or unbecoming. When Satan could not lower Job in the estimation of his Master, he endeavoured to procure the appointment, or at least the permission, of distressing events to him, hoping hereby to discourage and wear him out. “Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath,” &c. Thus he did to Job, and thus we may expect him to do to us. But if such events be permitted, they will only prove touchstones of our sincerity, and will, under God, refine us from our dross, and improve our views, feelings, and dispositions : so they did to Job.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. We see who they are whom God protects : let us neither accuse him of being unkind, nor unfaithful, if he does not hedge us about, unless we bear this character.

2. We see the nature of the protection and blessing which God affords to his people : if we belong to them, let us comfort ourselves in our security and prospects.

3. As we here see what insinuations Satan can bring against the best of men, and how industrious he is to bring affliction on them, let us not be surprised if thus he deal with us.

4. Let us endeavour to secure all the purity and grace of our dispensation, that we may be prepared for his assaults.

XV. THE FAITH AND HOPE OF JOB IN HIS REDEEMER.

JOB XIX. 25—27.

“For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.”

THIS celebrated text has been variously interpreted. While some, without any solid proof, have considered it as an interpolation, others have limited its meaning to the return of temporal felicity to Job; but if we carefully examine the preceding chapters, it will appear that he had no hope of deliverance from his calamitous circumstances, in the present world. Yet, while he was weighed down by a heavy load of afflictions, and misrepresented by his mistaken friends, he looked forward to the coming of his Redeemer; and had a comfortable assurance that he would avenge his wrongs, raise him from the dead, and bless him with the beatific vision. First, Job had a living Redeemer; secondly, he thought his afflictions would terminate in death; but, thirdly, he had a joyful hope of a happy resurrection from the dead.

I. JOB HAD A LIVING REDEEMER.

1. *The work of a Redeemer is great and highly important.* First, he pays a price for the lost possession of his brother: “If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold,” Lev. xxv. 25. Secondly, he saves and delivers him: “He saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy,” Ps. cvi. 10. Thirdly, he vindicates and avenges his brother: “The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer,” Num. xxxv. 19.

2. *Christ is the Redeemer of men.* He bought us with his blood. We “were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as

a Lamb without blemish and without spot," 1 Pet. i. 19. He saves and delivers his people from the guilt and power, and from the pollution and punishment of sin. He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Tit. ii. 14. And he will vindicate and avenge his church: in allusion to this, he says, "The day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come," Isa. lxiii. 4.

3. *The Son of God, our great Redeemer, was living in the days of Job*; and he had a saving interest in him, in the afflictions which he suffered, from the devil and from men. He says, "My Redeemer liveth." If our Lord had no existence prior to his incarnation, Job should have spoken in the future tense, saying, 'I know that my Redeemer shall live;' but he spake correctly, for his Redeemer was then living. He had glory with the Father "before the world was," John xvii. 5. He was rich in a prior state of existence, yet for our sakes "he became poor," 2 Cor. viii. 9. He was the only begotten son of the Father, John iii. 16.

4. *But how does it appear that the Redeemer of Job was the Son of God?* From these words, "He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." This could not be affirmed of any *goel*, or kinsman of Job, who was then living; but the prediction, if applied to Jesus, is exceedingly appropriate. It was in part fulfilled when he appeared in our nature; for "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," Gal. iv. 4. But it will be completely fulfilled when he arises in judgment; for the words may be rendered, "he shall arise" from his seat, and stand upon his feet, as a judge, to give sentence or to execute judgment. This was the posture in which judges always delivered their sentence; and hence we frequently read in the Scriptures, of God arising to judgment, Job xxxi. 14; Ps. lxxiv. 22; lxxxii. 8.

5. *Job knew his divine Redeemer.* But how did he attain that knowledge? It might be by tradition. God had promised a Saviour and deliverer, and that promise was handed down from one generation to another. Besides, the promise which was given to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," was probably well known to Job; but it is most probable he knew his Re-

deemer by immediate revelation. God might make a discovery of this great truth to him,—first, to support him in his unparalleled affliction ; and, secondly, to comfort and encourage the church in after ages.

II. PIOUS JOB THOUGHT HIS AFFLICTION WOULD TERMINATE IN DEATH.

1. *When he spake the words of the text, his skin was destroyed.* He fell into the hands of Satan by the permission of the Lord ; and he smote him with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown, chap. ii. 6, 7. These were fiery eruptions, or ulcerous eating sores, which destroyed the skin. “And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal.” For *scrape*, says a learned author, the Chaldee and Arabic use a word commonly applied to pulling leaves and bark off from the tree. How deplorable was the state of Job, when scraping himself with potsherds ! Well might he say, “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, oh ye my friends !” ver. 21.

2. *After his skin, he expected his whole body to be destroyed.* The word *worms* is not in the original, but is supplied by the translators ; they seem to have conjectured that his skin was destroyed by worms, and that they would proceed to destroy the body. How far this opinion is correct, we know not ; but Job certainly had an idea, that the destruction of the whole body would speedily follow the destruction of the skin. The word *body* is also supplied, and properly, because that was certainly intended.

3. *Death and the grave, with their solemn attendants, closed every earthly prospect of that deeply afflicted, but eminently holy man.* He afterwards said, “I know thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living,” Job xxx. 23. And we also must die ; but when, we know not. These bodies, however beautiful and strong, will perish in the grave. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart,” Isa. lvii. 1. But, like Job, he hopes to rise again.

III. JOB HAD A JOYFUL HOPE OF A RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

1. He positively affirms, that, after the destruction of his body, he should see God in his flesh. But how can that be the case, either with him or others, if the dead rise not ? Man was created with a body, and will live in an embodied

state, to all eternity ; but that cannot be without a resurrection, because his earthly and material frame returns to dust, as a sad punishment of his apostacy from God, Gen. iii. 19. How God will raise the dead is unknown ; but the fact is certain. It was revealed to Job, and has been indubitably proved by the resurrection of Jesus. With these eyes of flesh we shall see God our Saviour. What a happy sight ! Then the sorrows of life will be past, death will be destroyed, and a blessed eternity will follow !

2. I shall see for myself, he says, "and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." Good men wish well to all ; but they claim the blessings of grace and glory as their own. Others, no doubt, will see and enjoy the Redeemer ; but I shall see and enjoy him for myself. He will appear in my cause ; he will deliver me from death and the grave ; he will vindicate my character ; and he will avenge me of my foes. And all this will take place, though my reins, or vitals, are consumed within me ; for all things are possible with God ; and he who made the world can raise the dead.

INFERENCES.

1. Jesus has been the hope of pious men in all ages. Abraham rejoiced to see his day, "and he saw it, and was glad," John viii. 56. Moses and all the prophets foretold his coming ; and gave witness, "that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," Acts x. 43.

2. He is our only Redeemer and Saviour. We are lost, but he came to seek and to save us ; we have enemies, but he has conquered them ; we are dead, but we may live by him for ever.

3. It is both our duty and our privilege to renounce our own righteousness ; to trust in him only ; to love and honour him ; and to follow him in the regeneration, through evil report and good report. Amen.

SIGMA.

XVI. THE BLESSEDNESS OF DOING GOOD.

JOB xxix. 13.

“The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me : and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

MEN may be divided into three classes : first, the selfish, who get all they can, without giving any thing ; secondly, the mischievous, who do all they can to injure others, both in their property and in their persons ; and, thirdly, the truly benevolent, who, like our blessed Saviour, go about doing good. Job was of this class in ancient times : for while he ranked high in civil society, and possessed wealth in great abundance, he “caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.” The remarks which he makes on his former conduct have the appearance of boasting ; but they were made in answer to the heavy charges which were brought against him by his mistaken friends. In all cases, when a good man is charged with crimes, he may be allowed to defend himself. The cause of truth and virtue requires it ; and it is acceptable to God and to wise and good men. He states,

I. THAT THE BLESSING OF HIM THAT WAS READY TO PERISH CAME UPON HIM.

1. Men may *perish for want of the common necessities of life*. This is generally the effect of extreme poverty, which may be brought upon a man by providential afflictions, by artful and designing men in unfair dealings, by robbery, or by indolence and extravagance. But whatever may have been the cause of poverty, the poor are real objects of pity, and should be relieved by their wealthy neighbours.

2. A man may be ready to perish by some imminent danger and peril to which he is exposed, by the violence and cruelty of wicked men, or by some calamitous event, which could neither be foreseen nor prevented. This was the case of Joseph when his brethren threw him into the pit, Gen. xxxvii. 22. It was afterwards the case of the man who went from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, Luke x. 30.

3. In these cases *men of pure benevolence interpose*, like Reuben and the good Samaritan, to save the poor unhappy wretch who is ready to perish. Job, as a prince and a magistrate, had, probably, exerted his power and authority on behalf of persons in similar circumstances; and had fed the hungry and clothed the naked, when they were ready to perish with hunger and cold.

4. But how many *in the moral world are ready to perish by their sins and iniquities!* They are on the brink of eternal ruin, under the wrath of God, and under the curse of the law. Pious and benevolent men pity them; warn them of their danger; pray for them; and do all in their power to pluck them as brands out of the fire. And it is highly probable, that Job, whose piety was eminent, was often engaged in this work of mercy.

5. The *blessing* of him who is ready to perish comes on the man who relieves the needy, who rescues them that are exposed to danger, and who converteth a sinner from the error of his way. This blessing implies love and affection, a good word, and earnest prayer: so that a benevolent man is beloved, has a good report, and is often remembered at a throne of grace. Happy is the man, who, like pious Job, has the blessing of him that was ready to perish, in the hour of affliction, and especially in the hour of death!

6. But what a miserable wretch is he who has the execrations of those men whom he has oppressed and injured by acts of cruelty and injustice! Every human heart, unless influenced by divine grace, curses the oppressor and the tyrant, the fraudulent and deceitful, and the selfish miser, whose heart was never touched by the cries of suffering humanity. Job had many afflictions, but this did not fall to his lot.

7. Some men disregard *public opinion*, and care not either what men think or speak of them; but they are persons of worthless character who have nothing to lose. When we pursue truth and righteousness, we may disregard the opinion of the erring multitude; but the good opinion of the wise and virtuous, and the blessing of him that was ready to perish, are worth a diadem; and he who wears a crown, under the curses of mankind, is a miserable wretch!

II. JOB HAD CAUSED THE WIDOW'S HEART TO SING FOR JOY.

1. Widows are placed in very *distressing circumstances*. Their husbands who loved them, who provided for them, and who protected them, are dead; and they will be seen no more on earth, either by their families, their friends, or their foes. The widow is desolate, solitary, sorrowful, and frequently without comfort. It is well for her to trust in God, and to continue in prayer; for she has but little to expect from an ill-natured world. This sentiment is finely expressed by the apostle Paul: "Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day," 1 Tim. v. 5.

2. In some instances *the widow has a large family left to her care*, and finds it exceedingly difficult to manage and direct them, both in the duties of life and of godliness. Her authority is not regarded, in the most weighty affairs, even by her own children. In acts of disobedience they would have trembled before their father, but the mother, when alone, is considered as being weak and helpless. This is frequently a source of grief to her, especially as it brings to her recollection those happy days, when she was supported by her dearest earthly friend.

3. The world is ever ready to *take advantage of a desolate widow*. They know she is not expert in business; that she has but little firmness in the hour of danger; and that she is ever liable to be imposed on by the cunning craftiness of men. On these grounds, divine revelation pronounced dreadful threatenings on those who injure her, and blessings on him who is her friend. The Lord comes near in judgment, and is a swift witness against those that oppress the widow, Mal. iii. 5. But he promises that those who do not oppress the widow shall dwell in the land of Canaan, Jer. vii. 6, 7.

4. Job was *kind to widows in the days of his prosperity*. It is probable he inquired diligently after them, found them out, and watched over them with paternal care; and that he spake comfortable words to them, supplied their pressing wants and necessities, and pleaded their cause in the gate. That conduct was generous, noble, and worthy of a great and good man.

5. His kind attentions and benevolent exertions "caused the widow's heart to *sing for joy*." The phrase implies comfort, encouragement, and gladness. In such a friend,

the loss of the widow was partly made up; and we may suppose, that while she blessed her benefactor, who was instrumental of so much good, she ascribed the glory to God, who is "the giver of every good and perfect gift." Her tears were wiped away by the hand of friendship; her downcast countenance was lifted up, and was covered with a pleasing smile, and her heart was joyful.

6. Let us *imitate the example of Job*. Our wives, whom we love, may become widows; our children may be fatherless; our house may be desolate. How should we like them to be treated when we are gone? Should we not like some kind friend to take them under his wing? Then let us act this friendly part ourselves, Matt. vii. 12. Inquire after widows, visit them, examine their state and circumstances, weep over them, relieve them, defend their cause, and cheer their drooping spirits. This is a great and an important branch of pure religion before God, James i. 27. It is pleasant work, the blessing of God will attend it, and it will be followed by high rewards.

INFERENCES.

1. Acts of benevolence are good proofs of a *renewed heart*. What are our creeds, our modes of worship, or our profession of religion, if love be wanting? James ii. 14—16.

2. Those who are kind to others will be *abundantly repaid*. If the poor cannot repay them, yet they will have an approving conscience, and the blessing of heaven, Heb. xiii. 16.

3. In the day of judgment *works of mercy will be brought forward as evidences of piety*. The judge will say, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me." Matt. xxv. 35, 36. May these words be said to us in that great and awful day! Amen.

XVII. THE POOR MAN'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF.

PSALM XXXIV. 6.

“ This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

THERE is an important reality in religion, which is enjoyed by all true believers. They do not follow cunningly-devised fables, but receive the truth as it is in Jesus. They are enlightened, quickened, pardoned, adopted, and “renewed in righteousness and true holiness.” And having obtained mercy of the Lord, they highly extol the riches of his grace. They become zealous in his cause, and greatly rejoice in the prosperity of Zion. They recommend religion to all around them, and earnestly desire the universal extension of its influence. And hence David, as a subject of saving grace, breathes in this Psalm a spirit of ‘burning charity’ and fervent zeal. In the preceding context he invites all men to unite with him to magnify and praise the Lord for all his benefits; and in the text he encourages them, by the consideration of his own successful application to the throne of grace: “This poor man cried,” &c. These words describe—a humble character—a gracious privilege—and a happy deliverance.

I. A HUMBLE CHARACTER;—“*This poor man.*” It is highly probable that David here speaks of himself. Notwithstanding the dignity of his station as a king, he was deeply humble before God as a saint. Though he was not temporally poor as a man, he was spiritually poor and destitute as a sinner; and consciously poor and dependent as a believer. This language was, therefore, a faithful description of his humble state and experience, as the man after God’s own heart. It is also uniformly applicable to two distinct characters of mankind, and may be justly adopted,

1. *By the contrite penitent.* Such are thoroughly convinced of their depravity and sinfulness; and that naturally

in them “dwelleth no good thing.” They are entirely destitute of all the spiritual riches of knowledge, purity, and happiness; and are ignorant, guilty, polluted, and miserable, Rev. iii. 17. They are “without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world.” What an awful state of poverty and wretchedness is this! And yet such is the deplorable condition of all mankind by nature! And those who truly feel their sinful and perishing state, readily acknowledge their total destitution of spiritual good; and their utter insufficiency to please God, or save themselves. And hence the true penitent frequently exclaims, “Woe is me! for I am undone—God be merciful to me a sinner—Lord, save, or I perish,” Ps. li. 17; Isa. lxvi. 2.

2. *By the humble believer.* Though such characters are partakers of the “unsearchable riches of Christ,” they are still needy and dependent. They have many wants to be supplied, many evils to be removed, many enemies to overcome, many difficulties to encounter, many blessings to secure, many dangers to escape, many duties to perform;—and without Christ they can do nothing. Hence they deeply feel their helplessness and dependence on God, and have no confidence in the flesh. They are grateful for what they already enjoy; but their present attainments are very deficient. They have not already attained, neither are already perfect. Though they are “poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon them for good.” They are poor in spirit, but rich in faith, and heirs of heaven. The text also specifies,

II. A GRACIOUS PRIVILEGE;—“This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.” David was a man of eminent devotion. In all his afflictions and trials he had recourse to God, and gave himself unto prayer. Nor did he pray in vain. In the case before us he mentions,

1. *The object of his worship;*—“The Lord.” He was no profane idolater, but a devout worshipper of the God of Israel. He had correct views of his character, as the only object of religious adoration, and the giver of every good and perfect gift, Ps. xviii. 1—3. He was acquainted with his will; and hence he knew that it was both his duty and interest to wait upon him, and worship him in the beauty of holiness, Ps. xcv. 6, 7. He also trusted in his name, and expected salvation from him, Ps. lxii. 1, 2. He there-

fore carefully cultivated a spirit of prayer, and lived in holy fellowship with the covenant God of his fathers.

2. *The nature of his devotion*;—He “cried to the Lord.” This intimates earnestness. He did not merely ask, nor seek; but he cried and agonized, like a person deeply distressed, or earnestly engaged in an important pursuit, Gen. xxxii. 24, 26. It includes confidence. He believed that God both could and would help and deliver him. He had frequently found it good to draw near unto him, and was therefore encouraged to trust in him for every blessing, Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2. It also implies perseverance. His crying to the Lord was not a single or occasional act of devotion; but his regular and daily practice, Ps. cxix. 164. He felt the constant necessity of divine succour and protection, which induced him fervently, faithfully, and diligently, to cry unto the Lord for mercy, and grace to help in time of need.

3. *The success of his prayer*; “And the Lord heard him.” He is never inattentive to the cries and tears of his people, Isa. lix. 1.—“His eyes are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.” He sees all their desires, understands their “groanings which cannot be uttered,” and hears all their supplications and thanksgivings both in public and in private, Psalm xl. 1. He accepts their prayers. They approach him in the way of his own appointment, and worship him in spirit and in truth, Prov. xv. 8. He answers their prayers. This was the case with the Psalmist; he “cried to the Lord,” and he saved him in the day of trouble. The answers of faithful prayer are always certain, seasonable, and compassionate; for, “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,” Psalm xci. 15, 16. Matt. vii. 11; 1 John v. 14, 15. The text records,

III. A HAPPY DELIVERANCE;—“The Lord saved him out of all his troubles.” Whether David here refers to some particular season of calamity or not, is uncertain; but his declaration is highly consolatory, and suggests the following instructions for the encouragement of the saints.

1. *They are frequently subjects of troubles.* This requires no argument to prove it; the Scriptures assure us, that this has always been the case; and experience sufficiently corroborates the fact. Yea, “many are the afflictions of

the righteous," in this vale of tears. They are subject to the common trials of human life, and are often chastised by the Lord for their profit in holiness, Heb. xii. 6—11. They are frequently exercised with personal, domestic, spiritual, and temporal troubles; all of which are designed to "work together for their good."

2. *They are supported under their troubles.* They are not left to bear them alone; the Lord is with them, and into his hands they commit the keeping of their souls. They approach him with confidence, and find him to be their "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," Isa. xliii. 2, and lxiii. 9. In their most trying seasons, his grace is sufficient for them, and will encourage them to possess their souls in patience. Hence they feel fully resigned to the will of God, trusting in his wisdom and goodness, and "cast all their care upon him, for he careth for them."

3. *They shall be delivered from their troubles.* Thus the Psalmist, and all the primitive saints, were saved from their sins and enemies, and out of all their troubles and afflictions. And God still delivers his people from many of their troubles while here, which they gratefully acknowledge with David in the text, Psalm ciii. 1—4. But whilst they are in a world of tribulation, their deliverance is not complete. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God;" where they shall be perfectly safe from all their troubles, both of body and mind, and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Isa. xxxv. 10.

This subject suggests,

1. The awful state of the prayerless, Job xxi. 15. Arise and call upon God, that you perish not.

2. The manner in which we should come unto God. It must be humble, fervent, and incessant. And,

3. The consolation and encouragement of the righteous, "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

XVIII. DESIRING COMMUNION WITH GOD.

PSALM xliii. 3, 4.

“O send out thy light and thy truth ; let them lead me ; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy ; yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.”

“MAN is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” The truth of this assertion is not less clearly proved by the experience of the rich and mighty, than by that of the labouring poor. Few persons have passed through a greater variety of circumstances than David ; and there is every reason to believe that his life was far less troubled and unhappy when he was a shepherd, than when he became an attendant at court, or when he sat on the throne of Israel. The psalms of David are expressive of his sorrowful or joyous condition or prospects, at different times of his eventful life. If this and the preceding psalm (perhaps originally one) are of his composition, they probably refer to the case of Absalom’s rebellion. It has been thought, however, that they were intended to represent the case of the captive Jews at Babylon, and their desire to return to the land of their fathers, and to the temple of their God. But whoever was their author, or on what occasion soever they were written, the writer appears to have been in a state of exile and deep distress ; and perhaps also of religious declension and darkness. Hence we find him complaining not only of a “deceitful man,” and “an ungodly (or unkind) nation ;” but of being “cast off” from God, ver. 1, 2. Yet he acts in a manner highly worthy of imitation. He repeatedly chides and encourages his soul, Psalm xlii. 5, 11, and xliii. 5. He trusts in the Lord, and stays himself as he can upon his God ; giving himself into his hands, and unto his service. Accordingly in our text he expresses the desire and the purpose of his heart. We consider,

I. THE PSALMIST’S EARNEST PETITION ;—“O send out thy light,” &c., ver. 3. Here we may notice the subject, and the intention of his request.

1. *The subject of his request*;—The emission of light and truth. Light is that glorious creature “which maketh manifest” to the sense of sight surrounding objects; and thus enables a person to perceive himself and his situation with its advantages or disadvantages, so as to avail himself of what is favourable, and to avoid what is otherwise. Metaphorically, it signifies mental illumination, or the means or instruments of such illumination, John iii. 19. Thus the epithet is applied to “believers,” Eph. v. 8; who are “children of the light,” because illuminated. And to God’s word, Psalm cxix. 105; Hos. vi. 5; and to his ministers and people, Matt. v. 14; John v. 35, as the means of illumination. Light is also a cheerful subject, and therefore it is used to denote prosperity, comfort, felicity, as in Psalm xcvi. 11; Isa. lviii. 8, &c. The “truth” here requested may mean religious truth in general; as in John xvii. 17; and, if so, then the prayer is that of every missionary, and of every friend of missions. But it more properly intends the fulfilment of God’s promises to the petitioner; a verifying of those promises in his experience, that he might prove and rejoice in their truth. Now, as we have already observed that the Psalmist may here be regarded as an example, we may make some practical use of his language, by observing how it suits, 1st, The case of the convicted penitent. Heretofore he was in darkness, among the “children of the night,” 1 Thess. v. 5; in a state of ignorance, of both himself and his condition; of error, fearful of spectres, of worldly want, &c., which haunted his imagination; but fearless of the gulf of perdition, on the very precipice of which he stood; of stupid slumber; lost to concerns of high and eternal moment; or of delusive dreaming; a fancied peace and prosperity, Ezek. xiii. 9—11; Rev. iii. 17. But now he is awake from his sleep, Eph. v. 14, and the day dawns upon him; yet only just so as to make the darkness appear visible. He has an imperfect view of his own vileness; but he wishes to see it clearly, that he may humble and despise himself. He has some vague apprehensions of danger, of which he wishes to know the nature and extent; especially as he has some hope that God may be merciful to him. Yet he wants to see how God can forgive his manifold sins, and to be blest with an assurance

of pardon. Hence he prays, "O send out thy light," &c. —2ndly, The case of pious souls, when exercised by temptations and distressing providences. Such sometimes "walk in darkness," &c. Isa. i. 10. This was often the case with David. Thus also with Abraham, Heb. xi. 8, 17, 18.—Jacob, Gen. xlii. 36.—Joseph, Gen. xxxix. 20.—Moses, Exod. ii. 15.—Daniel, chap. vi. 16.—and others, too numerous to mention, Heb. xi. 32—34. "To the righteous there ariseth light in darkness." In respect, therefore, of both direction and comfort, they may pray, "O send out," &c.—3rdly, The case of those who are, by personal or family affliction, detained from religious ordinances. Darkness denotes affliction, calamity, perplexity, &c. Job xv. 22—24; Isa. v. 30, and viii. 22; Joel ii. 2. Yet in this case also, God can "make darkness light before you," &c.; therefore, "in every thing by prayer, &c. let your request be made known."—4thly, The case of persons who have lost a sense of God's favour, and mourn the hiding of his face. We have no reason to suppose that he capriciously withdraws a sense of his love, or that he arbitrarily does so. The apprehensions we have of his nature, and of his attributes of goodness, mercy, &c. forbid this supposition, Psalm ciii. 13. And the express declaration of Scripture contradicts it. For "the path of the just," &c. Prov. iv. 18. There may be, without our fault, "heaviness through manifold temptations:" but where this darkness is found, our "iniquities have caused God to hide his face," &c. Yet let the backslider, who complains, "O that it were with me," &c., Job xxix. 2, urge the petition, "O send out," &c. "Lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me." In the case of every one of these characters you observe,

2. *The intention of his request is the same;—a participation in religious enjoyments.* 1st, Here is an acknowledgment of need. 2ndly, Not only a willingness, but anxiety to be led and taught. 3rdly, A resolution to walk in the light, and to submit to the truth of God. And 4thly, A humble anticipation of being so instructed as to be enabled to correct past errors, and of coming to worship God in the beauty of holiness, Psa. xlii. 4, and cxxii. 1. Agreeably to this is,

II. THE PSALMIST'S PIOUS PURPOSE;—"Then will I go unto the altar of God," &c. ver. 4. Mark,

1. *The object of his devotion;—"God;"* as opposed to

the creatures. Not domestic, social, or public pleasures or achievements; but God, who is the source of light and truth, James i. 17. "He leadeth the blind," and can lead us, "by a way they have not known." "My God," as opposed to every other, and peculiarly mine. The object of my affection; the object of my trust, Ps. lxxiii. 24—28.

2. *The fervour of his devotion*;—"Unto God my exceeding joy," or, "the gladness of my joy," *marg.* The giver of every innocent creature-enjoyment; and whose approbation crowns the whole with gladness. But more than this, the Christian rejoices not only in the gifts of God, but in God himself, Rom. v. 11; Gal. iv. 7. Religion, while it affords prospects the most extensive and delightful, gives joys the most pure, and permanent, and exalting. How inferior the joy of the sensualist, the worldling, &c. Ps. iv. 7; Isa. ix. 3.

3. *The manner of his devotion*;—"I will go unto the altar," &c. 1st, He would sacrifice. Is a sin-offering necessary? It shall be offered. Is a thank-offering due? It shall be rendered: yes, for, 2ndly, He would praise;—"Upon the harp," &c. "We have an altar," &c. "By him therefore let us offer," &c. Heb. xiii. 10, 15.—3rdly, This was public worship; an open avowal of God's goodness, and his servant's obligation. The Psalmist was a man of personal piety, which he evinced by practical piety. Are we such?—4thly, This was a public dedication; an engagement of himself in God's service, in any post that might be assigned him. Are you imitating this conduct; thus praying; thus purposing? If not, how dangerous your condition, to wander on in deepening darkness, till you fall into "blackness of darkness for ever!" But if you follow this example, divine light shall lead you in the right, the safe, the comfortable way, and bring you to the "holy hill" of Zion.

ZETA.

XIX. DAVID RESTLESS FOR THE JOY OF GOD'S SALVATION, AND THE SUPPORT OF HIS LIBERAL SPIRIT.

PSALM li. 12.

“ Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.”

THIS psalm was penned by David, subsequent to his offence in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, and after he had been brought to a sense of his sin and danger, by the message of Nathan the prophet. See 2 Sam. xii. 1—14. Although Nathan was authorized to say to him at that very time, that God had put away his sin, that is to say, the punishment which it deserved, and with which it would have been visited, had not his repentance prevented it, yet David was unable to rest in the mere assurance that his sin should not be punished. He must be favoured with that comfortable sense of Jehovah's approbation with which he had been indulged prior to his fall. Nor yet could he rest even here; but anxiously pressed under the protection of his liberal Spirit, “ Restore unto me,” &c. These words suggest,

I. THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS A BLESSING ENJOYED BY HIS PEOPLE. The ordinary sense of this term in the Scriptures, is deliverance from the punitive, and, in some degree, the painful effects of our personal transgression, and from the corruption common to man's nature. It is with great propriety that salvation is ascribed to God, Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20, and ciii. 3, 4. For who but God can remit the punishment due to sin? And who but he that appointed it, can dissolve the established connection between sin and the painful effects which flow from it? Or who but Jehovah can restore light and rectitude to fallen man? We need not stay to relate the way in which this salvation is bestowed on men, as the Scriptures fully and frequently set this subject before us; but that this salvation is an enjoy-

ment common to the saints of the Most High, is a thing that must be placed in a prominent point of view. Some contend that no such deliverance from the consequences of our sins can be had in this life; at least by Christians in general. And many who profess to enjoy, and who really do enjoy, in some degree, the salvation of God, strongly deny the attainableness of salvation from all sin in the present life. But that pardon and purity are enjoyed by the people of God, is evident from their experience as recorded in the word of God. See Rom. v. 1—5, 10, 11; also chap. vi. 22, and viii. 1, 2, 8—10; 2 Cor. v. 17; Ephes. ii. 10, and Gal. v. 16—25. And that all God's people are called to enjoy this salvation, is equally evident from the word of God. See 1 Thess. iv. 7, and 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. These words suggest,

II. THAT THE POSSESSION OF THIS SALVATION IS ACCOMPANIED WITH A SPECIAL AND PECULIAR JOY: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." This joy will spring,

1. From the very nature of the salvation enjoyed. To be delivered from our obligation to suffer eternal punishment, and from all the painful anticipations of it, must be matter of joy. Still more must it be an occasion of joy to be freed from all the inquietude, instability, and peril arising from the continuance of the carnal mind in us. But then it must,

2. Be evident to every thinking person, that this joy can be possessed by such only as are assured that this is their state. Some degree of comfort may be felt by him who despaired of salvation, when the possibility of his salvation is proved to him. A greater degree of comfort will exist in his breast who hopes at times that this salvation will be, and even is, wrought in him. But widely different is his joy, in whom the Spirit of Jehovah attests that this is his state and experience. See Rom. viii. 15, 16, and Gal. iv. 6. But,

3. This joy does not spring more from the consideration of the fact, than from the hope which this fact excites; or, in other words, it does not spring more from a consideration of what God has done, than from what he has promised to do. Thus we are said to be saved by hope, Rom. viii. 24. We are even said to rejoice in our hope, Rom. xii. 12. And to crown

all, we are said to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. i. 3—9. Well, therefore, may Christians sing with the poet,

"For this the saints lift up their voice,
And ceaseless praise to thee is given;
For this the hosts above rejoice;
We raise the happiness of heaven."

Again they sing—

"With calmly reverential joy,
So shall we all our lives employ,
In setting forth thy love;
And raise in death our triumphs higher,
And sing with all the heavenly choir
That endless song above."

But observe,

III. IF THE PLEASURE OF ENJOYING THIS SALVATION IS GREAT, SO ALSO IS THE DANGER OF LOSING IT. By sorrowful experience, David knew the possibility of losing the joy of God's salvation; for in the bitterness of his soul he here prays for its restoration, "Restore unto me," &c. Many, from whom better things might be expected, contend that none who ever truly enjoy this can ultimately lose it. But with all deference to the sincerity, learning, and arguments of such Christians, we think that if the joy of this salvation may be lost at all, for the same reason we think it may be lost for ever. The possibility of losing it for a time, the text clearly evinces: and David could not have lost this joy, had he not first sustained the loss of salvation itself. And even those who are most fully possessed of this salvation may not only lose it by yielding to temptation and to sin, (see Matt. xxvi. 41,) but also by neglecting to add to their virtues, 2 Pet. i. 10. And observe,

IV. That when our interest in this salvation has once been *wilfully forfeited*, and let it ever be remembered that it is impossible to forfeit it in any other way, it will wholly rest with Jehovah whether he will so much as suffer us to remain in a state of probation, still more, whether he will allow us to enjoy the same, or other, and better means of recovery than we had at first, Lam. iii. 22; Jonah iii. 9; 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. If any person present should be in this awful state, we would entreat such a one not to rest in it,

as he values his own soul. Here David did not rest; by prayers, by tears, and by groanings, he sought to recover the joy of God's salvation, and happily did regain it. See Ps. xxxii. 5, 6. And that mercy that was extended to David will also be shown to you if you seek it in a similar manner, see Mal. iii. 7. Particularly if your application for mercy be accompanied with such a sense of your vileness as renders you unable to forgive yourselves, and by such a sense of your incapability to stand without the liberal and continued aid of Jehovah as will drive you to him alone for help. For observe,

V. THIS WAS THE SPIRIT IN WHICH DAVID APPLIED TO HIS GOD. He not only prayed, "Restore unto me," &c., but added, "uphold me with thy free Spirit." He would have had no evidence of the sincerity of his penitence, had he not been anxious to avoid offences for the future. And without this anxiety to avoid future falls, he could not have resisted after-temptations. Not that he was competent of himself to resist them (even if he could have desired it) independent of the divine Spirit. And certainly the assistance and help of the Spirit had never been afforded to him had he lacked this desire to live piously for the future. Nor can we reasonably hope for mercy and help on any other principle. If therefore we have sinned and are wishful to recover the divine favour, let us,

1. See that our penitence is sincere. And,
2. If we are wishful to have the Spirit's aid, let us see that our hearts are firmly fixed to walk before God in uprightness. And,
3. If we are mindful to have as much of the joy of God's salvation as possible, let us take care that our enjoyment of salvation itself be indubitable and extensive.

IOTA.

XX. THE HIDINGS OF GOD'S FACE INSUPPORTABLE TO HIS PEOPLE.

PSALM CXIX. 132.

“Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.”

How appropriate to our time is the language by which the apostle characterized the ungodly of his day, “without God in the world.” How many are there who openly deny his being! How many more are there who, at the very time they confess his being and attributes, desire not the knowledge of his way, live without his fear, and endeavour to exclude him from their thoughts! How degrading is such conduct! By a figure of speech, even inanimate nature is represented as being troubled at the hiding of its Creator's face; while intellectual man is seeking his felicity in the neglect of his Creator. The spark cannot be kept alive but in connection with the fire from whence it issued; the branch cannot live but in connection with its parent stock; nor yet the infant but in connection with its mother; but man, whose dependence on his God for all things is, if possible, still more entire, seeks his happiness in the destruction or annihilation of this dependence. But with pleasure be it spoken, this description suits not all; there are a few whose desire is to the Lord, and the remembrance of his name. These exclaim, “O that we knew where we might find him!” they inquire, “When shall we come and appear before God?” they pray, “Lord, lift thou upon us the light of thy countenance.” Or, in the language of the text, “Look thou upon us,” &c. These words suggest,

I. THAT A GOOD MAN MAY SOMETIMES LABOUR UNDER THE HIDINGS OF GOD'S FACE. This, most evidently, was the Psalmist's case, or he had had no need to utter these expressions. By the hidings of God's face, I do not mean a deprivation of all sense of his favour, as such a thing cannot happen to any good man, as such, unless in case of bodily

distemper. This language is rather to be understood of : partial and temporary obscurity of his evidence of the divine favour, and, consequently, a decrease of consolation and spiritual vigour. Under such variations of feeling, God's people sometimes labour. Perhaps some present are now passing through these painful circumstances. Painful to many, indeed, they are not, for, having been taught to attribute such changes in God's people solely to the sovereign pleasure of God, and not to any cause in themselves, they feel no more on account of such variations in their experience, than we do for the occurrence of those disastrous events, over which we have no control whatever. But to those who are taught to trace up such changes to some previous change in man, as every Christian ought to be, they either are or ought to be exceedingly painful. What! ought any man to be at ease while sustaining the greatest losses? And can any enlightened and conscientious man be easy in his mind, while he either does or ought to stand reprov'd for the commission of offences against his God that are unrepented of? And lest we should be at ease in such a state, the text,

II. SUGGESTS TO US THAT THE PSALMIST COULD NOT REST IN IT :—He said, “look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me.” These words are figurative, and are to be understood of God's returning favour. Such a look as he affords the penitent, when he heals his broken heart, Isa. lxvi. 2. Or such a look as he affords his people when in danger, 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Or such a look as he bestows on the objects of his tenderest solicitude, Ps. xxxiii. 18. Perhaps we may say that the words take in all these meanings. O how desirable is such a look to a soul that is on the point of being overwhelmed with a sense of its unworthiness and desert of punishment! What can supply its place? Can earthly prosperity? or sensual enjoyments? or diversions of any kind? or worldly parade? or austerities? or inferior attainments in real godliness? If so, then why are ye tossed and not comforted, ye restless wanderers after rest? And no wonder that those who are seeking after rest to their souls should be anxious to enjoy the light of Jehovah's countenance; for even those who have not the shadow of a doubt of their acceptance with God, do greatly covet such manifestations of the divine regard. “Look on the face of thine

anointed," said the Psalmist, when he questioned not God's favour to him. And again, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." No soul that is aware of the refreshment which such a look conveys, will ever be satisfied without it. But observe,

III. Though a good man cannot rest without a token of God's favourite regard, yet will his applications for it be ACCOMPANIED WITH GENUINE EXPRESSIONS OF HUMILITY;— "Be merciful unto me as thou usest to do to those who love thy name." He was well convinced that those who do not love it, have no claim on the favourable regard of the Most High. And he must have been conscious of his own love, or he had not had the front to have asked this thing. He was not willing to fall short of any good usually bestowed on such as love God, as such a disposition forms no part of a genuine humility, or of religious excellence. Nor did he dare to ask for more than was usually bestowed on the saints, as this would have argued great arrogance, indicating that he either thought himself better than others, or that the Most High had not favoured his people in a manner equal to their deserts. And as the good man steers clear of the rocks of pride and arrogance in his applications to God for his merciful regard and blessing, there can be no doubt of his success. For observe that the language of the text intimates,

IV. THAT JEHOVAH HAD BEEN WONT TO FAVOUR SUCH AS LOVE HIS NAME. "As thou usest to do," &c. If it had not been so, then God's lovers had been in a worse condition than the lovers of the creature; and the Scripture account of their state has been a false one. So far therefore as the experience of the saints had accorded with the statements of the divine word, and had surpassed that of the lovers of the creature; and so far as these facts had either been recorded or reported to him; so far must the Psalmist have been encouraged to make his application to God; and making it in the spirit mentioned in the text, he could not do it in vain. From hence we gather,

1. That we have every reason to love the name, and devote ourselves to the service, of the Lord.

2. That if we are labouring under the hidings of God's face, we should instantly conclude the sole cause of that disaster to be in ourselves, and immediately institute an

inquiry into the cause, and unfeignedly lament and put it away. Nor should we ever rest until we have experienced a restoration of the divine favour.

3. That our successful application for the restoration of the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord, should not embolden us to trifle with his favour, but to dread its forfeiture.

IOTA.

XXI. THOSE WHO LOVE GOD WILL BE PRESERVED; THOSE WHO ARE WICKED WILL BE DESTROYED.

PSALM cxlv. 20.

“The Lord preserveth all them that love him; but all the wicked will he destroy.”

THE moral world comprises two divisions of men, who are distinguished by titles of a directly opposite character; who are directing their steps in essentially different ways, and who will enter a widely-distant abode in that eternal world to which they are constantly and precipitately tending. And, considering that every individual is included in one or the other of these divisions, nothing can be more important than an investigation of our characters, that we may ascertain to whom we belong, and what will be our destiny when God shall bring us into judgment. In doing this we must make our appeal to the law and to the testimony; the Bible is the only true test of discrimination. Here we discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. The text directs our attention to this subject: it has two parts.

I. THOSE WHO LOVE GOD WILL BE PRESERVED BY HIM.

II. THOSE WHO ARE WICKED HE WILL DESTROY.

I. THOSE WHO LOVE GOD WILL BE PRESERVED BY HIM.

1. *Those who love God are reconciled unto him.* They were once enemies to God in their minds by wicked works. They disliked God's government; his laws they wilfully violated. They disliked his people; they cast out their names as evil. They disliked his ordinances; they seldom frequented his house, and when they did it was a weariness to them; but God enlightened their minds, convinced them of sin, and they sought redemption, and by faith received the atonement, and through Christ became reconciled unto God.

2. *Those who love God think highly of him.* They not only entertain exalted ideas of his natural perfections, such as his eternity, immensity, and infinity, but they think highly of his love, and wisdom, and mercy. They think highly of him in the character of a father, a husband, a king, a portion, &c.

3. *Those who love God speak frequently to him.* Prayer is speaking to the Lord; "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord," said Abraham. "While I was speaking in prayer," said Daniel. Those who love God speak to him concerning themselves, on behalf of their families, the church, and the world; and they feel a pleasure in speaking unto the Lord, because he speaks to them in return.

4. *Those who love God labour to imitate him.* We instinctively imbibe the spirit and temper of those whom we love; and those who love God will be assimilated into his likeness, and be "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

5. *Those who love God are pleased to obey him.* "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments;" and these commandments are never deemed grievous to those who love God. "The Lord preserveth all them that love him." 1. Preservation supposes danger. Those who love God are in danger from their spiritual enemies, the powers of darkness; from their carnal and ungodly neighbours among whom they dwell, and by whose wicked examples they are liable to be corrupted; and from their senses, passions, and propensities, which are not yet wholly sanctified unto God. The Lord preserveth them. 2. They are unable to preserve themselves. They are ignorant, and do not know their foes; feeble, and cannot withstand them. 3. The Lord preserveth all them that love him. He illu-

minates their souls, and enables them to discover their danger, the craft of the devil, the snares of the world, and the treachery of the flesh. He strengthens their minds to resist temptation. The Holy Ghost who is in them, is a Spirit of power, and they are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." He often interposes in their behalf; and, by a special providence, preserves those who love him: Noah was preserved in the ark; Lot by angelic guardians was brought out of Sodom; Elijah was fed by ravens, in a time of famine; Daniel was preserved in the den of lions; and his illustrious companions in a furnace of fire. And though he may not always preserve their bodies in times of danger, yet he will preserve their souls unto his heavenly kingdom: and all who love God are included in the promise; none are overlooked, none neglected, none left to themselves.

II. THOSE WHO ARE WICKED GOD WILL DESTROY. The Scriptures are so particular and circumstantial in delineating the characters of the wicked, that a reference to them is sufficient to instruct us on this subject. We must not imagine that men are not wicked merely because they hold an elevated rank in society. "I have seen," said David, "the wicked in great power," &c. Yes, a man may have the power of a prime minister, as Haman had, or the power of a sovereign, as Pharaoh had, and yet be as wicked as they were. Nor because they possess great wealth. Their grounds may bring forth plentifully; they may trust in the abundance of their riches, and strengthen themselves in their wickedness. Nor because they acquire popular praise. Herod made an oration, and the people shouted, "It is the voice of a god!" but immediately the angel of God smote him, and he was consumed with worms, and gave up the ghost. That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. But we describe the wicked,

1. *By their enmity against God and contempt of his authority.* Job declared of the wicked in his day, that they said unto God, "Depart from us," &c. Job xxi. 14. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God," &c. Ps. x. 4. "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?" ver. 13.

2. *By their practical violation of God's law.* "Horror hath

taken hold of me, because of the wicked who forsake thy law," Ps. cxix. 53. All the laws of God are broken by the wicked; one violates the law of temperance, another the law of chastity, another the law of honesty, and every wicked man offends against the law of love.

3. *By their hatred of the righteous.* "The wicked watcheth the righteous," &c. Ps. xxxvii. 32. All the persecutions which the righteous have sustained, have been inflicted by their wicked persecutors.

"All the wicked will he destroy." The destruction by which God will punish the wicked is not extinction of being; the souls of the wicked will eternally live; nor will the bodies of the wicked be annihilated, for they will rise to a resurrection of damnation: but,

1. *All their sources of carnal pleasure will be destroyed.* The eyes, and ears, and taste, and smell, are avenues of pleasure in this world; but God will destroy all these. In hell, nothing will be seen but sights of woe; nothing heard but groans of agony, or shrieks of torture; nothing felt but a sense of exquisite punishment.

2. *All their capacity for intellectual gratification will be destroyed.* The understanding will then perceive the dreadful loss which the soul has sustained; the memory will present to view a horrible catalogue of crimes committed against God and man; the conscience will eternally accuse the miserable victim of despair; and all the mental powers will minister to the misery of sinners.

3. *This destruction implies the infliction of positive punishment.* "All the wicked will he destroy." God is the moral governor of the universe, and he is a just being. He will not at all acquit the wicked. And the destruction which God will bring upon them will be horrible; snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest, will be rained upon them.—Universal; soul and body will be destroyed.—Endless; the wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction, &c. 2 Thess. i. 9.

INFERENCES.

1. *We see here the characters and the privileges of the pious.* They love God, and God preserves them. How amiable does such a character appear! A lover of God. Is it possible that such a man should be hated by the world?

Yes, but God preserves them. What a motive should this be to induce us all to seek to love God ! Preservation we all court ; to danger we are all exposed, but the name of the Lord is a strong tower ; O that we may run into it and be safe !

2. *We have also the fearful end of the wicked.* They will be destroyed, endlessly destroyed. God will destroy them ; were the threatened destruction to be effected by human agency, they might hope to escape ; but there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord. And God will destroy all the wicked. O let us cease to do wickedly, that we may escape the destruction which awaits the wicked !

BETA.

XXII. THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

PROV. XI. 18.

“The wicked worketh a deceitful work ; but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.”

OPPOSITES illustrate each other, inasmuch as when things of opposite natures and qualities are presented to the mind by way of contrast, they shew to greater advantage or disadvantage the properties of each, and make an impression the more lively and lasting. Of this principle considerable use is made in the sacred Scriptures. And this, not only in their general tenor of description and announcement, in which they exhibit the “beauty of holiness,” and the turpitude of sin, with the blessed effects of the one, and the dreadful consequences of the other, but also in many particular and pointed passages, which declare “to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked,” &c., Isa. iii. 10, 11. In no part of the Bible is there more frequent application of this mode of teaching, than in this book of Proverbs. Several chapters are thus occupied, among which

we may reckon that from which our text is taken. Instance ver. 1—3, 5, 6, 17, 18. Here we have,

OPPOSITE CHARACTERS; OPPOSITE PRACTICES; OPPOSITE RESULTS. And it will be our business at this time to contrast these opposites, with a view to the moral effects they were intended to produce. In following up this proposal, it is not of much importance which side of our subject be viewed first. Only, as one side is represented as being more positive and substantial, (for, in fact, wickedness is stated to be mere fallacy and deception,) our first attention may be directed to the better side of the case;—"to him that soweth righteousness," and to whom "there is a sure reward."

1. The radical idea of the word righteousness seems to be that of equality, as the equilibrium of a pair of scales, &c. See Parkhurst, *sub voce*.

2. Hence, applied to moral or religious matters, it means a correspondence between our obligations on the one hand, and our performance on the other.

3. But as the rightful claims of God and man are embodied in the divine law, which is not only holy, but just and good, righteousness is considered as obedience or conformity to the law, see Deut. vi. 25.

4. And, as this rule rather declares what it enjoins to be fit and proper, than makes it so, righteousness, in relation to the arrangement and constitution of things, is order, fitness, reality, truth.

Now the opposite of "him that soweth righteousness," or the practically righteous man, is "the wicked," who "worketh a deceitful work." Accordingly,

1. The radical meaning of the word here employed appears to be that of inequality, unfairness. Hence wicked, that is, unequal balances, Mic. vi. 11. Agreeably to this idea,

2. The word, when used in a moral sense, means a want of correspondence between duty and performance; a deficiency of weight of righteousness, Job x. 6, 7, 15. Remark how small a degree of moral turpitude is sufficient to constitute a man wicked. In God's righteous judgment, not only he who outrages decency, and riots wild in blood and mischief, but he who neglects his duty, is a sinner, James iv. 17. Consistently with this,

3. As what is right in itself is embodied in righteous laws, so wickedness is nonconformity to those laws; for instance, in respect of relative duties, Col. iv. 1, see also chap. iii. 18—22. And the same law which forbids violence and oppression, reprobates all dishonesty and deception, James v. 4, 6. The principle is wrong, wherever it is, or however it may operate. For,

4. As righteousness is order, fitness, &c., so that which is the essence of wickedness, is disorder, incongruity, deception, a lie; an unsound principle, naturally producing a deceitful work. Man is an active creature; and you seldom or never find a person who is wicked, only because he leaves undone something that his duty requires. He also does what is prohibited, and hence the word here used is properly enough descriptive of bad men in general. As is the tree, such is the fruit. Before we quit this part of the subject, we may make two remarks. First, Righteousness respects our duty both towards our God and our neighbour; and, secondly, It respects principle as well as practice.

The first of these remarks will serve to shew how a thing which sometimes appears very strange, may, nevertheless, be very proper; namely, that a person who has lived a moral life should be deeply and painfully convinced of sin. Righteousness renders to all their due. But though a proper education or native goodness of disposition may have preserved this person from greatly violating the rules of filial or fraternal duty, and he has been taught to despise a lie, and to spurn temptations to fraud or dishonesty; so that, in respect of his neighbour, no man can convince him of sin; yet, alas! he sees and feels that in all his conduct he has had no respect to God. What he did was not done to him. The Lord complains of being robbed, Mal. iii. 8, 9, and he is convicted of having robbed him of that time and those talents which should have been, in private or in public, devoted to his service. Hence he is humbled, from a view of the baseness of his ingratitude and negligence; and perhaps fears that the grace he has so much slighted will now be for ever denied him, Job xlii. 5, 6.

Our second remark also bears on this case. The convinced sinner feels that hitherto his principles have been wrong. It was a ruling principle with him that his business

here was to buy and sell, or to enjoy the pleasures, &c., of life, (whereas 'man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever,') and that religion was an encumbrance to be avoided as long as possible, &c.; whereas "her ways are ways of pleasantness," &c. But where wrong sentiments are indulged, wrong dispositions and practices naturally follow. And, to say the least, the man is in danger of being "taken captive by the devil at his will." Hence result, 1. Treachery towards friends. Hear Jeremiah's complaint, chap. ix. 4, 5. and David's, Psalm lv. 12—14. 2. Fraud and falsehood in business, Prov. xx. 14. 3. Extortion and oppression, Isa. iii. 15. 4. Mal-administration; a never-ceasing theme of complaint, Isa. x. 1, 2.

In all such cases, our text characterizes the worker. However much he may dislike or disclaim the character, yet he who worketh thus is "the wicked." And it characterizes the work—a deceitful work. Deceitful (often) in its intention. Deception, the very object proposed. Deceitful (always) in its nature. Weighed in the balances, it is found wanting. Deceitful in its operation and influence. Here are promises that mean nothing, and which can, therefore, only lead to disappointment. Hollow professions, which are as "the staff of a broken reed," &c. Nor is the person intended to be deceived the only victim. The deceiver himself often becomes the dupe of his own delusions. By abuse, the moral sense becomes blunted, &c.; then follows what is described, Isa. xlv. 18—20; 2 Tim. iii. 13. Deceitful in its results. — Generally in this world. A tradesman who makes a point of telling profitable lies, is detected and disliked (for every one hates to be deceived,) is disbelieved, even when he speaks the truth, and, being deserted, comes to ruin. And certainly in the world to come. Every man loves happiness; but sin will leave the sinner to mourn his disappointment and self-deception, in "weeping and wailing," &c.

But mark the **OPPOSITE RESULT OF OPPOSITE PRACTICE**; "To him that soweth righteousness a sure reward." 'Tis true, "there is none righteous," inasmuch as "all have sinned," &c., Rom. iii. 10, 19, 23. But let us attend to God's method of making the sinner righteous, according to the principles already laid down.

1. *He convinces him of his unrighteousness*; whether

towards man or towards himself. The sinner becomes humble and penitent, and so far becomes what he should be—becomes righteous, so far as righteousness consists in acting in character. He makes reparation for injury done to man, in property, reputation, &c. And confesses his hated sins before God; who shews mercy to him, and blots out his transgressions, Rom. iv. 3—8.

2. But more than this, God enlightens, transforms, and renews the soul, 2 Cor. iv. 6, 16; Eph. iv. 23, 24. So that the man is “born again, created anew,” &c. In short, righteous principles are implanted, 2 Cor. v. 17.

3. As he has begun to act according to God’s rule in practical repentance, believing, &c., so he proceeds to sow righteousness, to practise and recommend it in like manner, Hos. x. 12. Like the husbandman, he “soweth in hope,” and perhaps in some instances “hath need of long patience.” Yet to him there shall be a “sure reward.” His is,

1. A certain reward. The perfections and the word of God assure this.

2. A suitable reward; a reward of truth, a reward in kind: an increase of correct and pious feeling, Matt. v. 6, 8. Hence,

3. A satisfying reward. See David’s declaration, Psalm xvii. 15.

4. An abiding reward. The getting of riches by a lying tongue is a vanity, &c., Prov. xxi. 6. But truth is substantial and enduring, Psalm xix. 9; 2 Cor. iv. 18.

ADVISE, 1. *Pause*, and inquire whether such a change has been effected in you.

2. *Pray*, for convincing and converting grace.

3. *Persevere*, through evil and through good report.

ZETA.

XXIII. ISAIAH'S VISION OF CHRIST.

ISAIAH VI. 5—7.

"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts," &c.

THIS prophet was peculiarly favoured by the Lord, and has ever been distinguished as the most eminent of the Jewish seers. He was singularly honoured with clear and comprehensive views of the person and character of the Messiah; and minutely predicted the circumstances of his incarnation, and the triumphs of his kingdom. In this chapter, he was highly privileged, by having a distinct and glorious vision of the Son of God. It took place when he was in the temple, where he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," attended by numerous seraphims who were perpetually employed in rendering him their profoundest homage, and devoutly adoring his holy name, ver. 2, 3. The effects which these things produced on his mind, and what occurred on this interesting occasion, he informs us in the language of the text; from which we may learn, that this vision was,—glorious in its object,—instructive in its design,—and gracious in its influence.

I. THE PROPHET'S VISION WAS GLORIOUS IN ITS OBJECT;—"Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." The dignified person whom he saw was the promised Messiah. This is evident from the testimony of St. John, who, when referring to this chapter, expressly declares, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him." It is certain that "no man hath seen God," or the divine essence, at any time, but his "only begotten Son hath declared him." When the prophet saw him "in the bosom of the Father," he appeared in the twofold character of essential God, and an Almighty Sovereign. Hence he justly specifies,

1. *The divinity of his person*;—"The Lord of hosts," or according to Lowth, "Jehovah, God of hosts." This lan-

guage is certainly a legitimate and powerful argument, in proof of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. To deny this would be equally opposed to just reasoning and sound criticism. The prophet actually saw his personal glory, even the glory of "the only begotten of the Father;" and boldly asserts his essential divinity, as the second person of the triune Godhead. And this character of the Saviour perfectly accords with the descriptions given of him throughout the sacred writings. The eternity of his existence fully proves that he is absolutely God, and equal with the Father, John viii. 58, xvii. 5; Heb. xiii. 8. He is therefore justly called—"both Lord and Christ,—the Lord of glory,—the Lord of all,—the Lord of hosts," Phil. ii. 11.

2. *The sovereignty of his character*;—"Mine eyes have seen the King." Christ's kingly office is clearly revealed in the Scriptures, and is highly encouraging to his people, Ps. cxlix. 2. He is a supreme king, even "the King of kings, and the Lord of lords," Prov. viii. 15. A universal king, whose kingdom ruleth over all things, both visible and invisible, Col. i. 15—18; Rev. i. 18. A spiritual king; whom God has set upon his holy hill of Zion, to be the head and governor of his church, and reign in the hearts of his people, Psalm ii. 6; Luke xvii. 21; Col. i. 13. An everlasting king; who shall continue to reign and prosper when all other kings and their dominions shall be destroyed; "but of his kingdom there shall be no end," Dan. vii. 14; Heb. i. 8. How glorious is the Redeemer's character! Let us adore his name, and gladly bow to his sceptre. Observe,

II. THE PROPHET'S VISION WAS INSTRUCTIVE IN ITS DESIGN;—"Then flew one of the seraphims," &c. As no scripture is of private interpretation, this vision was, no doubt, intended not only for the personal benefit of the prophet, but also for the general instruction of mankind. It evidently illustrates,

1. *The nature of salvation*;—"Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." We are not only actually guilty, but morally polluted. When God therefore saves sinners, he takes away their guilt by his mercy, and purifies their hearts by his grace. Both pardon and purity are equally necessary for our present and final happiness. They are freely promised in the gospel, and are happily enjoyed

by all the righteous, 1 Cor. vi. 11. This was certainly the blessed experience of the prophet, and such is still the salvation of all true believers.

2. *The medium of salvation*;—"Then flew one of the seraphims unto me," &c. Here God employed one of his angels as a messenger of his grace to the prophet. He came flying with a live coal in his hand, which was taken from off the altar. This was most probably the altar of burnt offering, which had always coals of fire burning upon it, Lev. vi. 12, 13. This manifestly typified the Lord Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and the high priest over the house of God for ever, Heb. ix. 14; xiii. 10; 1 John iv. 10. The seraph's laying the live coal upon the prophet's mouth, might represent the necessity of a personal application of Christ's atonement as the only medium of pardon, purity, and every spiritual blessing, Heb. xii. 24. It might also point out the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost, as a "spirit of burning and refining fire;" and is, in the whole, an instructive and emblematical representation of the divine method of saving sinners to the end of time, Matt. iii. 11; John xiv. 6; Heb. iv. 14—16.

3. *The assurance of salvation*. This was unquestionably the privilege of the prophet. He was assured of it by the declaration of the seraph, and the sign which he received, ver. 7. This, without doubt, was highly consolatory to his mind, and greatly encouraged him in his work. And though we cannot expect to receive it in the same way, it is still a possible privilege, and is enjoyed by many, who can declare, like David, what God has done for their souls. The Lord communicates it by his word and Spirit, and gives his people "the knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins," Rom. viii. 15, 16; 1 Thess. i. 5. This will lead us to consider,

III. THE PROPHET'S VISION WAS GRACIOUS IN ITS INFLUENCE;—"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone," &c. All spiritual intercourse with God is profitable to the soul. This was manifestly the case in the instance before us. The prophet was both powerfully affected and greatly profited by this heavenly vision.

1. *It was deeply humbling*;—"Woe is me! for I am undone," &c. I am struck dumb, "because I am a man of unclean lips," &c. He had such a discovery of the infinite

splendour and purity of the Lord of Hosts, that he was more than ever convinced of his own personal pollution, and of the sinfulness of the people among whom he dwelt. These things deeply humbled him before God, and filled him with unfeigned repentance and self-abasement. The manifestation of God to the soul is always productive of genuine humility and contrition of heart; and leads the penitent believer to exclaim, "Woe is me! I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," Job xlii. 5, 6.

2. *It was personally sanctifying.* Whilst the prophet was abashed and humbled, on account of his uncleanness, he received a comfortable assurance of his pardon and acceptance with God. His sin was also purged, and he was made "a vessel unto honour," more deeply and fully "sanctified and meet for the master's use." By communion with God we feel his transforming power, and are changed into the same image, 2 Cor. iii. 18. A believing discovery of his glory and purity is always assimilating and hallowing in its influence, Ps. lxiii. 2, 3; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

3. *It was highly encouraging.* The prophet was called to the painful task of addressing the Jews, who were "a disobedient and gainsaying people." He deeply felt the importance of his office, and the difficulty of his work; and humbled under a sense of his own inability to discharge the duties of his high commission. But by this divine vision his fears were instantly removed, and he was greatly encouraged to engage in the work which God appointed him to do, with great delight. When the Lord said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" the prophet immediately said, "Here am I, send me." Nothing is deemed hard or unreasonable by the believer, that appears to be the will of God, Phil. iv. 11—13.

To conclude,

1. Let us carefully search the Scriptures, which testify of Christ and reveal the way of salvation.

2. Let us diligently improve the privileges we enjoy, till we obtain the perfect vision of the "king eternal," 1 John iii. 2.

ETA.

XXIV. THE LANGUAGE OF REAL PIETY.

ISAIAH xxv. 1.

“O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name.”

PIETY has often been counterfeited. What was only a spurious production, has been palmed on the religious world for a genuine article. They who practise this kind of deception may succeed to some extent in the line of imposition; but while others are thus misled in their views of such characters, they themselves, who act in this manner, are most deeply and awfully involved in this religious fraud. The piety of the heart knows nothing of guile; it is simple, open, undisguised. Vital piety is a divine nature introduced by the eternal Spirit into the human soul; there it lives and breathes; and possessing the whole heart, it generates feelings, and words, and actions, which evince its existence there, and demonstrate its heavenly origin, sublime excellence, and happy tendency. We have much of this expressed in the words of the text, “O God, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name.” This is the language of,

I. CHOICE. Man having understanding and liberty, can fix his attention on a variety of objects, and make a selection of such as he may prefer. From the nature and properties of those chosen, we may learn the distinctive views and prevailing dispositions of men; and, generally speaking, we perceive that their affections are wrongly placed. When objects are viewed through false mediums, the consequence of this error of the judgment, or will, is, men come to bad conclusions. Were they to adopt and secure a right medium, then, according to the light of truth and power of conviction of the nature, properties, suitableness, and durability of things, one and the same election would certainly be made. God having himself given us existence, and he only being equal to our capacities and wants, ought, of course, to have the preference in our esteem, affection,

and choice. That is the case with every enlightened and pious person, however distinguished as to professional name, religious form, or place of worship, country, colour, or employment. The man of sincere and heartfelt piety can truly say, "O God, thou art my God!" Here is a wise choice—an elevation of mind peculiarly sublime, raised above the fleeting shadows of this sublunary world, to the contemplation of infinite and adorable perfections,—high in a clime of salvation and bliss, far beyond the gross and limited range of the senses, and as much superior to the sordid pursuits of carnal men, as the illimitable bounds of eternity exceed the contracted expansion of time.

II. ASSURANCE. Presumption on the subject of religion, it is to be feared, is frequently practised. Men claim God for their God and friend, and profess to confide in his mercy and goodness, without having any scriptural authority for so doing. This, in some instances, may have originated in a religious descent,—“We have Abraham for our father,” Matt. iii. 9, without having experienced a gracious change of heart. “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God,” Rom. ii. 28, 29. A religious education may have produced this effect in some persons. If not correct, with regard to sound evangelical principles and views, by such an education moral habits may have been induced unconnected with gospel doctrines; the result must be a pharisaical religion, a “clean cup and platter,” a garnished outside, while the heart, as to its real state, is likened to an “open sepulchre, full of rottenness and dead men’s bones.” Wealthy persons, moved to sympathy and acts of beneficence, by the privations and sufferings of their fellow men; or prompted, by the example of others, to enrol their names in the lists of generous benefactors, who advocate the cause of suffering humanity, at home, or in distant lands; may presume to think, as these actions are formally good in themselves, and beneficial to others, that they who come forward in this way, are themselves, solely on this account, pleasing to God. But the apostle says, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and, though I give my body to be burned, and have not *ἀγάπη*, love, it profiteth me nothing,” 1 Cor. xiii.

3. Here let us observe, that a scriptural assurance of the divine favour can be obtained only by penitents who mourn before God the folly and crimes of their past lives, confess and forsake their sins, are anxious to obtain salvation, are found in a diligent use of the appointed means of grace for that purpose,—and by such persons only through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, resting only on his atoning sacrifice for remission of sins, and acceptance with God. Believers are “accepted in the Beloved.” They “receive the promise of the Spirit through faith;” and, by his direct testimony in the heart, are enabled to say, “O God, thou art my God.” Having received “the spirit of adoption,” they cry, “Abba, Father.” This is a divine assurance.

III. ENJOYMENT. If God could not make a human spirit happy, abstracted from all earthly objects and possessions, —then the whole moral world would assume a dark and frightful complexion; for our moral powers would exist without any adequate objects by which their energies could be excited and called forth, and to which they could be directed. In that case we should have to turn our attention to those sources for happiness, which have been proved ten thousand times, in all ages and countries, to be only broken cisterns, that can hold no pure water of permanent consolation. The world is a tumultuous scene, presenting a vast variety of objects; these are contemplated, and pursued, as if sufficient to fill the whole extent of the human mind. But, however successful that pursuit may be, with regard to obtaining these things, our Saviour says, “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” Luke xii. 15. That God can make man happy is most certain; for he can remove from the conscience all that guilt which oppresses it, and generates slavish fear; as well as destroy all those evil propensities which most sensibly afflict and render him miserable; and having thus taken out of the way all these obstacles, impediments, or obstructions, and opened a delightful intercourse, he can communicate large spiritual blessings, which shall delight and fill him with pure and substantial happiness. When a finite capacity is thus exercised on an infinite object, and a state of fellowship is graciously established, the soul receives daily supplies from that boundless source of felicity; and God being infinitely greater than man, consequently there is

a store of goodness in him that can never be exhausted, but will run parallel with the line of his own duration. Under the influence of these views and feelings, the believer triumphantly exclaims, "O God, thou art my God!"

IV. EXPECTATION. All earthly things will have a period. All the productions of nature will fail. The seasons will cease to perform their annual revolutions. The sun, the moon, the planets, will withdraw their shining, and at the command of their Maker pass away. Time, which has given birth to such a vast succession of beings, shall become old, conclude his progress and records, and be no more! On what shall human beings depend, in this extensive and final catastrophe of things? What is there that shall remain unmoved amidst the general ruin? If any should attempt to console themselves with the certainty of being removed from the earth, before the period of this dissolution of nature, in that case we may inquire, What will your departure amount to? You cannot escape away, but at the expense of the decomposition of your material body: and what will support you in that dread hour, when your heartstrings shall break, your eyes roll in their sockets, the curtains fall and obstruct the organs of vision; when articulation shall fail, and all the senses be lost in the complete ruin of the system; when the immaterial spirit shall be disembodied, and enter into an untried, unknown world? Affecting crisis! How many have arrived here; but, oh, how few rightly prepared! However, the Christian believer can then, looking up, say, "O God, thou art my God!"

V. GRATITUDE. Gratitude is a tribute justly due for favours received. In proportion to our sense of obligation will be the warmth of this acknowledgment. As the bountiful donor of spiritual blessings has an undoubted claim to the most lively expression of grateful feeling, from persons so highly favoured with these invaluable gifts; so there is no duty they are better prepared to discharge, nor any on which they enter with greater delight. The feeling secures the performance, and both together form a climax in the character of truly religious persons. They are not insensible to their situation and circumstances in this world, to physical or mental suffering, to privations or afflictions, to temptation or persecution; but, at the same time, they

have joys mingled with their sorrows, ease with pain, honour with opprobrium, triumph with suffering, to that degree, if not at all times, yet frequently, that with their whole soul they exclaim, "I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name." Though this excellent state or degree of piety is attainable in time, yet it is closely connected with the felicity of heaven. It is a noble effort to develop the divine character, and shew forth its glories. It is a song of praise begun here, but to be continued for ever. Oh, what must the celestial world be, where gratitude always exists, and knows no interruption; where the inhabitants unceasingly praise God and the Lamb; and where this rapturous enjoyment will be increased, as obligations are continually multiplied!

A practical application of this subject cannot but be attended with the happiest results.

THETA.

XXV. PROSPERITY ANTICIPATED.

ISAIAH xxxiii. 21.

"But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby."

A RELIGION which comes from God must be suited to the necessities of those for whom it is intended. The infinite goodness and wisdom of the Author ensure this. Such is the religion of the Bible. It finds man careless and ignorant; and it makes those discoveries which are calculated at once to enlighten and to stimulate. It finds him guilty; and offers him a free and full pardon of his crimes; and to his pollution it suits its renewing grace. But there is another part of his case which requires to be provided

for. Such is our make and constitution, that, without hope of something future, the present soon ceases to satisfy; and we yawn over our enjoyments. Here again the Bible meets our wants, and holds out blessings of grace and blessings of glory. These offers are, indeed, lost on but too many. Yet there are some who have sufficient prudence to avail themselves of the advantages of their situation. Such may adopt the language of our text. To illustrate this subject, we consider,

I. **THE CHARACTERS PRIVILEGED**;—Who may say, “Unto us,” &c. This is a point to which we are not, perhaps, sufficiently attentive. It may be pleasing enough to our hearers to be addressed generally as “fellow Christians—Christian brethren—beloved,” &c. But, “what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord.” He always strongly marks the different characters to whom he promises his blessings or otherwise. Take a few instances of a thousand, Gen. vii. 1, xviii. 23, and xix. 22; Prov. i. 24—33; Isa. iii. 10, 11; Mal. iii. 16—18; Matt. vii. 22, 23; John iv. 24; Rom. ii. 6—11; Rev. ii. 23. Thus we are taught to discriminate. And in the present case we may find the leading features of the persons in question either expressed or alluded to in the chapter before us. From this we are led to infer that they are,

1. *Praying characters*, (ver. 2.) who feel their own weakness, and depend on the Lord for “salvation;” who feel their unworthiness, and entreat him to “be gracious.” Sensible of their wants, they have heartily and practically “waited” for him. In consequence they are become,

2. *Pardoned characters*; people that are “forgiven their iniquity,” (ver. 24.) This supposes that they have felt their iniquity, Acts ii. 37; confessed and forsaken their iniquity, Prov. xxviii. 13; and accepted of God’s terms for the blotting out of their iniquity, Rom. iii. 21, 22. Justifying faith is purifying faith, Acts xv. 9. Therefore they are,

3. *Renovated characters*. Their spiritual sickness is healed by the heavenly physician, (ver. 24.) who corrects the disorder of their understanding, judgment, affections, &c. They are “created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Accordingly, they are,

4. *Practically consistent characters*; (ver. 15.) in their

general conduct; "He that walketh righteously:" their sincerity of speech; "and speaketh uprightly:" their integrity of feeling; "that despiseth the gain," &c.:—their resistance of temptation; "that shaketh his hands, stoppeth his ears," &c. And, to crown the whole, they are,

5. *Pious characters*. They "see the king in his beauty," have respect to "the land that is very far off," and delight in "the solemnities of Zion," ver. 17—20. All is sanctified by being consecrated at the shrine of piety, and being done with reference to the God of all their mercies. And this leads us to speak of,

II. THE AUTHOR OF THEIR BLESSINGS;—"The glorious Lord." To him the Scriptures ascribe all our good, James i. 17. And hence prayer (Ps. cxviii. 25), and thanksgiving for prosperity (Isa. xxvi. 12), are to be offered to "the glorious Lord." This title expresses what he is really, and what in his people's estimation. It expresses what he is in his nature; most worthy, excellent, perfect; independently of all operation; glorious in name and majesty, Nch. ix. 5; Ps. cxlv. 5:—in his works; which proclaim his power, wisdom, &c., Ps. xix. 1; yet the splendours of the heavenly bodies but feebly represent that light with which "he clothes himself as with a garment:"—in his word; which discloses his moral perfections of justice, mercy, love, &c. Here he is seen "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." But the title marks also what he is, in his people's apprehension. The heavens have no glory to the blind, nor has holiness any charms for the sensual and wicked. But the characters just now described have their understandings enlightened, their hearts changed; so that they see and admire "the beauties of holiness," &c., while they acknowledge him to be their "Lord;" and thus, as citizens of Zion, recognise his authority, submit to his laws, and claim his protection and recompense. This is more fully expressed in ver. 22. We remark,

III. THE NATURE OF THEIR BLESSINGS;—"The glorious Lord will be unto us *a place of broad rivers*," &c. This is, in eastern description,

1. *A place of fertility*; enriched as by "the river of God," Ps. lxxv. 9; and producing abundantly, Isa. xlv. 4; Ezek. xix. 10. So abundantly shall God provide, in Zion, the church. He will "abundantly pardon," abundantly

strengthen, “abundantly bless her provision,” &c., Ps. lxx. 10—13, and cxxxii. 15; Isa. xl. 10.

2. *A place of pleasantness; of salubrity and refreshment.* See chap. xli. 17.—“The poor and needy seek water,” &c. Amidst the toil and dust of the world, “as the hart panteth,” &c., Ps. xlii. 1. And God refreshes with assurances of his love, and foretastes of his heaven;—of beauty and variety. The “broad rivers” are supposed navigable, and therefore affording intercourse and commerce. So, in Zion, it is pleasant not only to enjoy religion of home growth, but also to participate in the importations of missionary news, &c. And if we have any thing of this kind to export to other churches, this is “more blessed” still.

3. *A place of peacefulness;* not on a stormy mountaintop, but in a sheltered vale. Apply to an unpersecuted state; in which brethren dwell together in unity, Isa. xlviii. 18, and lxvi. 12.

4. *A place of security;* defended from land enemies by “broad rivers;” on which “no galley or gallant ship,” no sea foe, shall molest us. Thus the Lord shall defend against every open or insidious adversary, Isa. xxvii. 3; and xxxi. 5.

5. *A place of perpetual fertility, pleasantness, &c.* These broad and deep rivers shall not fail. The rills of creature happiness may cease, but God is unchangeable, Isa. xl. 28—31. This is a condition, therefore, to be coveted—sought—valued—retained.

ZETA.

XXVI. REPENTANCE RECOMMENDED.

JOEL ii. 13.

“ Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

MANY excellent things have been said, and justly said, of the Bible. It has been celebrated as containing history the most ancient and authentic ; as recording some of the most remarkable events which have taken place on the theatre of the world ; and as exhibiting examples of all that is great and good, in domestic, civil, or religious life. It reminds man of his dignity and his destiny, and opens a prospect through the gloom of death, into the regions of eternal light and happiness. But on no one account are the Scriptures more to be valued, than on account of that fidelity with which they every where, in their historic and prophetic, as well as didactic parts, represent our present condition and duty. They not only inform us of what was man’s estate as he came out of his Maker’s hands, or what may be his state when mortality shall be swallowed up of life ; but they represent him, as at present, fallen, disordered, guilty, and in danger ;—they urge him to act according to his circumstances, and encourage him to do so. In our text we have,

I. *THE IMPORTANT DIRECTION GIVEN ;—“ Rend your heart—and turn unto the Lord,” &c.* It is of little consequence which part of this direction is first considered. But as the prophet here speaks of their turning, and the proper manner of their doing so, we may be allowed to speak of them in this order. It is evident that the direction, “ Turn unto the Lord your God,” pre-supposes,

1. *A state of heedless inattention.* The position from which they were to turn, was one in which the back was upon God, Jer. ii. 27. In consequence of this, though God reveals his excellence, the person beholds not “ the beauty of holiness,” &c. He reveals himself as the universal Parent, providing liberally for all, and filling the earth with

his bounty, James i. 17; but the man who looks off from him, perceives it not. Contrast Ps. lxxv. 1, 9—13, and Ps. c. And notwithstanding, in the work of redemption, divine wisdom, justice, and goodness, are fully displayed; yet the sinner is inattentive to the provision made, and to the benevolence which has made it. Contrast Ps. lxxxiv; 2 Cor. ix. 15; 1 John iii. 1, 2.

2. *A state of careless and criminal negligence.* How provoking, if when you were to give orders to a servant, he were to keep his back turned upon you, and pay no regard to your words. Such the state of the careless and indolent, in Jer. xxxii. 33. And just so neglectful of "instruction," which expresses both their danger and their duty, are many in our day. They neither flee from evil, nor watch, nor pray, Prov. i. 24; Matt. xxii. 1—5.

3. *A state of obstinate disobedience.* Man is generally active. Accordingly, in Scripture, every man is represented as walking in some particular way. The wicked walk "in the way of their heart—walk contrary to God," &c. This the case of those already mentioned, Jer. ii. 26—28, and xxxii. 34, 35. In the present instance, the back being on the Lord, the progress is not towards, but from him;—the exact state of every drunkard, swearer, liar, worldling, &c., 2 Tim. iii. 13. Hence the direction, "Turn," &c. The impropriety, ingratitude, imprudence, and wickedness of this state will appear, when we remark, that the Being towards whom we have been so disrespectful and disobedient, is most worthy of our highest regard and devotion. He is most worthy in himself; He is "the Lord." The self-existent, and consequently, the centre and source of excellence. Such the doctrine of Exod. xv. 11; Ps. cxi. 1—3. He is most worthy, in respect of his dealings with us. He is "the Lord, thy God." Particularly, He has distinguished us from inferior creatures; by bestowing on us a nobler nature, and making us capable of the notion of "God;" and thus putting us in a condition to know and worship him. Elihu, therefore, justly complains of the thoughtlessness and ingratitude of those who do not inquire, "Where is God, who teacheth us more, maketh us wiser," &c. Job xxxv. 10, 11. He has distinguished us, as men, from fallen angels; by providing redemption for us, and thus offering himself to us as our God in Christ,

Heb. ii. 16. Hence the thanksgivings of the church on earth, 2 Cor. iii. 18., and iv. 6, and of the church in heaven, Rev. v. 11—13. He has distinguished us from the heathen; by an explicit revelation of himself, his will, and his plan of salvation; and thus offers himself as our God, in contradistinction from idols. Paul thought it one of the greatest of Jewish privileges to have the sacred oracles, Rom. iii. 2. The Christian revelation is “more glorious, it excelleth,” 2 Cor. iii. 10; 2 Tim. i. 10. He has distinguished us from many of our contemporaries, who have been cut off in their sins; whereas we have a longer trial, a faithful ministry, &c. blessings of providence and grace, and offers of eternal glory. And have we still neglected to turn to God? Then what cause for further direction—“Rend your heart, and not your garments.” An allusion here to the custom of rending the clothes in cases of mourning. This is more expressive than our custom of wearing new black; and quite as reasonable. Nor is it to be distinguished as being absolutely forbidden in the text; but only as of no importance without, or in comparison of the other; according to the Hebrew mode of expression, which puts a negative on one thing, in order to express another more strongly, as Hos. vi. 6, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” No merely outward action avails with him “who searcheth the heart.” Yet we may derive instruction here, from considering what the rending of the garments was intended to denote. This action was employed to indicate,

1. *Excessive grief.* As the sign of this, it was not only very general, but very ancient. See the cases of Reuben and Jacob, Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34; and of Job and his friends, Job i. 20, and ii. 12. What so fit a subject of grief as this, that we have involved ourselves in guilt and misery, and exposed ourselves to death eternal; and that our sin has “crucified the Son of God,” &c.? Acts ii. 36.

2. *Great loathing and abhorrence.* In cases of bodily disease, Lev. xiii. 45, or of moral depravity, 2 Sam. xiii. 19. This the object of the High Priest’s conduct, Matt. xxvi. 65. Our ingratitude, folly, criminality, &c. just cause of loathing, Ezek. xx. 43; Rom. vii. 24.

3. *Deep humility and earnest deprecation.* Thus Ahab humbled himself, 1 Kings xxi. 27—29. A proper view of the demerit of sin, and of the Saviour’s sufferings, will rend

the heart, Zech. xii. 10. We should, therefore, dwell on these things till we are induced to “turn,” &c. with hearty submission, Hos. xiv. 2,—with humble and warranted confidence, Ps. cxxiii. 1, 2; Isa. xlv. 22, and lv. 6, 7,—and with affectionate devotion, Acts ix. 6, 20. To this purpose consider,

II. THE CHEERING ASSURANCE AFFORDED; —“For he is gracious and merciful,” &c.

1. *This revelation warrants our approach*:—“He is gracious and merciful”—words expressive of the most melting compassion and tenderness. This is verified in our own experience, Lamentations iii. 22, 23.

Objection 1. I have offended so much and so long! But “he is slow to anger.” See Mic. vii. 18, and Mal. iii. 6.

Objection 2. Yet there are so many threatenings! The text says, “He repenteth him of the evil.” This the language of accommodation. Among men a change of measures follows a change of mind. Hence God is said to repent, Jer. xviii. 7, 8; Jonah iii. 2—10.

2. *This revelation requires your return*—to “the Lord,” your Proprietor, to whom you owe your all; and to whom you must account for all. “To him every knee shall bow.” Humble yourselves, therefore, and then,

3. *This revelation encourages your address*. Ask, and receive now, the effects of his grace and mercy.—Pardon, Exod. xxxiv. 7.—Healing, Hos. xiv. 4.—Adoption, Rom. x. 11—13, with viii. 14—17.—Grace, Heb. iv. 16. All the present privileges of children, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. And, finally, all their eternal enjoyments, Heb. xi. 16; Rom. viii. 16, 17.

ZETA.

XXVII. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS TO BE SOUGHT FIRST.

MATT. VI. 33.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

It was well observed by a heathen philosopher, that the “necessities of the body are the proper measure of our care for the things of this life.” And if this rule were observed, many anxieties and disappointments would be prevented; and many who fall a prey to ruin would escape it. But is this rule regarded? Just the contrary; for instead of making their bodily necessities the measure of their cares, the generality of men make their appetites, their pride, their ambition, and their covetousness, the standard of their desires, cares, and pursuits. But wherefore do they so? Is it because experience uniformly attests the success of those who adopt this practice? Certainly not. Experience attests the contrary. Is it that reason and revelation approve of the practice, when it is attended with success? It is not; for neither of them can approve the practice, whatever success may attend on it; how is it possible that either of them should approve it?—The practice is often followed by disaster, and never with good. It is degrading to our nature, destructive of the interests of society, dishonours God, and leads to the most fearful results. Instead of approving of this practice, reason murmurs at it, while revelation lifts up its voice, and cries against it loudly, as weak, worthless, and wicked. Revelation is ever reminding us of its issue, dissuading us from it, and directing our steps into another and a better course. Its language is, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

I. THE COURSE OF LIFE THAT IS ENJOINED ON US;—
“But seek ye first the kingdom of God,” &c.

II. THE PROMISE THAT IS ANNEXED TO THE OBSERVANCE OF THE INJUNCTION;—“And all these things,” &c.

I. We have THE COURSE OF LIFE THAT IS ENJOINED

ON US to notice ;—" But seek ye," &c. Parkhurst observes, that the phrases, " kingdom of God," and " kingdom of heaven," refer to Dan. ii. 44, and vii. 13, 14, and denote that kingdom or dominion which the God of heaven was to set up, and give to the Son of man. Or, in other words, that it denotes the kingdom of Christ, which was to exist in more imperfect circumstances on earth, but in the most perfect manner in heaven. Hence, in some scriptures, these phrases relate to this kingdom as it exists on earth ; as Matt. xiii. 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, and 52. While in others they refer to its heavenly state, as 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, and xv. 50. This kingdom of our Immanuel, set up in the hearts of a willing people, is altogether distinct and different from that absolute dominion which he exercises over the creation as its Creator and Conserver. For, in that, all men, bad and good, are naturally and necessarily included ; while, in this, none are considered as subjects, but such as have yielded themselves up to Christ, Ps. cx. 3. To this kingdom it is, therefore, that the text refers. We know that some attempt to confine the words of the text to the apostles, thinking that they were addicting themselves to the things of this life in a manner that could not comport with their duty as the ministers of salvation ; and that the object of Jesus Christ, in these words, was to correct this excessive inclination to the world. And it must be confessed, that such a construction of the passage renders it highly deserving the notice of every minister of the gospel. But, after all, we cannot but think that these words were intended as a direction to all to " seek the kingdom of God," &c. And,

1. Every one must endeavour to secure the erection of this kingdom in his heart, or, in other words, to become a subject of Jesus Christ, and to secure all the benefits which he confers on his subjects, as his approbation, protection, royal presence, a place in the royal residence, and on the throne, &c. But,

2. In order to secure these, we must seek his righteousness. We must acquaint ourselves with the method in which God makes men righteous. And we must seek that righteousness which is required in all Messiah's subjects, and without which we cannot stand in this relation to him, not even in the most imperfect state of his kingdom ; as

the renewal of our nature, Matt. xviii. 3 ; faith in the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, John iii. 18, compared with Rom. iii. 25 ; purity in heart and life, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, compared with Heb. xii. 14. And the more of this purity any man possesses, the fairer is his prospect for heaven, Matt. v. 8. Now, since it is by faith alone that we can have the remission of our sins and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of holiness, and as without these we cannot possibly be the subjects of the Messiah, will it not argue an unpardonable ignorance, insufferable insolence, and the most determined and inveterate obstinacy, to seek admission into the kingdom of heaven without it ? And what can such a conduct do for us, but expose us to the most deserved and grievous disappointments ? For to refuse submission to the righteousness of God, still more to go about to establish a righteousness of our own, are the surest steps that we can take to exclude ourselves the kingdom of God. But,

3. If we are minded to seek the kingdom and righteousness of God most certainly and successfully, we must seek it *first*. Our Lord, in directing us to seek it first, intimates that it is of the greatest importance to us to secure it ; and is not this matter of fact ? What are all other things without this ? a blank. And, where this is, can there be any great lack, whatever else is wanting ? Does not this heighten the enjoyment of every other thing we have ? It, being thus important, should be sought before the embellishments, the conveniences, or even the necessaries of life. And as it is preferable to every other object, it ought to be sought first in order of time. This is the labour with which our probation-day should always begin. I would not insinuate that it can be finished in the morning of life ; nor ought it to be deferred until the evening of our probation-day, as then it is often negligently done, either for want of light to labour, or for want of strength and time, or for want of freedom from distracting circumstances. This, in truth, is the proper labour of the morning, noon, and evening of our probation-day. And, that we may transact this important business in the most enlightened and perfect manner, we should commence it at the very dawn of life. Besides, we may not be permitted to see the ordinary limit of man's day. Or, should we, we possibly may be dis-

qualified for this labour before we see it. And let not any one suppose that nothing effectual in religion can be done in youth; for it is not necessary to the religion of youth that there should be great maturity of understanding, much forethought, decision of character, and courage brought to it. These qualities are but too often wanting in the religion of the aged. All that is requisite, to make our religion what it should be, is to bring the best abilities we have unto it. If this be done, our pursuit of the kingdom of God and his righteousness will be most successful, as the blessing of heaven will be upon us. This leads me to consider,

II. THE PROMISE THAT IS ANNEXED TO THE OBSERVANCE OF THE INJUNCTION ;—"And all these things shall be added unto you." Here you see is,

1. The promise of the kingdom sought. Where is the person who would not rejoice in obtaining the promise of an inferior good, and that from a changing creature? How much more then should those who are seeking this kingdom rejoice in having received the promise of the greatest good, and that from the unchangeable God!—"It is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom," Luke xii. 32. But,

2. Besides the kingdom, he will add "all these things." What things? All those things that are necessary for the support and covering of the body, Matt. vi. 25, 31. After these things the Gentiles, that is, the unenlightened and unbelieving of mankind, seek first. But so must not we seek them, who know that they are but of inferior value, and unworthy of being made the matter of promise for their own sake. But we may rest assured that, when we put them in their own place, only seeking them subordinately, and the kingdom of God and his righteousness first, they will be added to us; for our heavenly Father knoweth that we need them, ver. 32. He gives them to inferior creatures, to the very fowls, nay, even to inanimate creatures; and will he withhold them from you?—He has prohibited your care for these things as unbecoming your dignity; and would he have done this, had he not intended to bear your griefs and carry your sorrows? ver. 26—30. But let no one suppose that, because that godliness we are here called to pursue "is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," that

therefore, all care and concern about the affairs of the present life are superseded. As God will only give the kingdom to those who seek it, so will he only give food and raiment to those who seek them, in a subordinate degree, 2 Thess. iii. 10. We learn, therefore, that by labouring subordinately for food and raiment, and principally for the kingdom, &c., every blessing for time and eternity will be secured to us, and that by virtue of our heavenly Father's promise.

IMPROVEMENT.

What are you seeking first? Perhaps you scarcely know. O ascertain the nature of your pursuit, for the honour of your understanding, and for your safety. We fear lest others of you, contrary to the dictates of your reason, and in defiance of the remonstrances of revelation, (O blush to own it!) are seeking, first, the world and the things of the world. Think, we beseech you, of the consequences of this conduct. Perhaps some of you are ready to say to us, 'We are seeking the kingdom of God, and have been seeking it for a length of time.' Seeking it for a length of time! How is it, then, that you have not found it? Surely there must be some defect in your seeking, or you would have found it long ere now. Pray God to discover the hindrance to you, and instantly put it away. Set yourselves now to seek the kingdom of God, &c., as though you were persuaded that this would be your only opportunity of doing this with success, and you shall now succeed.

IOTA.

XXVIII. CHRIST IN HIS ORDINANCES.

MATT. xviii. 20.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

THE Saviour delivered these words for the instruction and encouragement of his people, in every succeeding age of the church. In the preceding context he supposes the case of personal offence among his followers, and gives special

direction for the amicable adjustment of such offences. The offended brother is directed to endeavour to convince and reclaim the offender, by first going to him alone, and telling him of his fault; but if he will not hear him, he must take with him two or three witnesses; and, if he refuses to hear them and the church, he must be expelled their communion as an incorrigible transgressor, ver. 15—17. And, to encourage their exertions in the exercise of Christian discipline, the Redeemer informs them that all their faithful reproofs and decisions, in conformity to his instructions, would be highly approved and ratified in heaven, ver. 18. He also assures them that their united prayers for the divine blessing, in this and every case, would certainly be heard and answered; assigning as a reason his own omnipresence, which extends to all the assemblies of his saints;—"For where two or three," &c. In this interesting declaration we shall notice—the duty it prescribes—the instructions it suggests—and the encouragement it affords.

I. THE DUTY THE TEXT PRESCRIBES;—It is to "gather" ourselves "together in Christ's name." This is evidently an important obligation; and implies that we must meet,

1. *For the purposes of his worship.* When we worship the holy Trinity, in the unity of the Godhead, it should be with profound reverence and godly fear, Ps. lxxxix. 7. We should not carelessly rush into his sacred presence; but diligently seek a necessary preparation of heart, for the hallowed solemnities of devotion, Prov. xvi. 1; Eccl. v. 1,

2. As professing Christians, we should faithfully attend the instituted ordinances of Christianity, to confess our sins;—to acknowledge the divine goodness;—to call upon his holy name;—to hear the instructions of his word;—to commemorate the dying love of the Redeemer;—and to receive the communications of his grace, Ps. xxvii. 4, and lxiii. 2—5.

2. *On the ground of his mediation.* We cannot approach the Almighty in our own names, because we are sinners, and enemies to him in our minds, and by wicked works, Rom. viii. 7, 8. Nor is there any name, either in heaven or on earth, by which we can come to God, or be saved, but the all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ, Acts iv. 12. Through his atonement and intercession, "a new and living

way is consecrated for us," to the "Father of mercies," John xiv. 6; Heb. x. 19—22. Whenever therefore we meet together in his name, we must have special reference to his character and office; and entirely trust in his merits and mediation for acceptance with God, and the attainment of every blessing, John xvi. 23, 24; Eph. ii. 13.

3. *Under the influences of his Spirit.* No worship can be acceptable to God but that which is sincere and spiritual. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." We must not only draw near to him with our spirits, in the sincerity of our hearts, but we must also worship him under the enlightening, enriching, and hallowing influence and power of the Holy Ghost, Jude 20. And hence he is given to help our infirmities,—to teach us how to pray,—and to make intercession for us; that we may "worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," Rom. viii. 26, 27; Eph. ii. 18.—Such is our duty; let us therefore consider,

II. THE INSTRUCTIONS THE TEXT SUGGESTS;—These are various and important; but the following points are clearly implied, and consequently claim our particular attention. We learn,

1. *The essential Godhead of Jesus Christ.* His human nature is necessarily local in its situation, and therefore can only be in one place at the same period of time. But the Saviour promises to be in the midst of all his assemblies, however numerous, and in any and every part of the world at the same moment; which evidently proves that he must refer to his character as God, for in this sense only can his promise be true. As an infinite Spirit, his presence "fills both heaven and earth," Matt. xxviii. 20. And, if he were not essential God, why should we meet in his name? But, because "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," we must worship and "honour the Son, even as we honour the Father," John v. 23.

2. *The divine origin of religious ordinances.* This appears from the institution and design of the Sabbath, Gen. ii. 3.—The positive injunctions of the moral law, Exod. xx. 8—11.—The Mosaic dispensation of ceremonies, Deut. xvi. 16.—The example of Christ in the days of his flesh, Luke iv. 16.—The united testimonies and examples of the holy

patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and primitive Christians, Ps. lxxxiv. 2—4; Mal. iii. 16; Luke xxiv. 53.—Our moral obligations to God,—the general voice of Scripture,—the sacred character of religion,—and the instructive language of the text, in which the Saviour directs and encourages his people to “gather” themselves “together in his name.”

3. *The comparative indifference of outward modes of worship.* Under the law, the Lord particularly appointed the various ceremonies to be used by the Jews in his worship; but that dispensation is abolished by the coming of Jesus Christ. And, though the Saviour taught the necessity and spirituality of the worship of God as a pure spirit, he did not enjoin any external rites, as essential to the acceptance of true devotion, Luke xviii. 1; John iv. 23. In the text, he does not fix the time when, or place where, we should assemble in his name. Nor does he limit the number, or prescribe the particular ceremonies or forms to be adopted by his worshippers. These things are comparatively indifferent, though many attach great importance to them, John iv. 20. But the Lord looks at the heart; and whenever, wherever, and however his people “worship him, in the beauty of holiness,” he is in the midst of them, and will show them his salvation. This will lead us to observe,

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT THE TEXT AFFORDS. It is the compassionate language of the Saviour, in which he assures his followers of his presence in all their religious assemblies. And, according to this gracious promise, we are still encouraged,

1. *By the infinity of his presence.* His omnipresence is a doctrine highly consolatory to his people. By his general or universal presence, he fills all space, and exists in all duration, Heb. xiii. 8. But in the text he means his special and gracious presence, which ever accompanies the saints, and inspires them with joy and gladness in his ways, Exod. xxxiii. 14, 15; Luke xxiv. 32. He particularly manifests himself unto them in his worship, and is perfectly acquainted with the respective characters, motives, desires, and necessities of them that wait upon him, John xx. 19—22.

2. *By the certainty of his presence.* His promise is infallible. It was not limited to the apostolic age, but has been happily realized in every succeeding period of the

church. He is never absent from his ordinances, for nothing can prevent his being present with his devout worshippers. And how encouraging is the reflection that he is with them on every occasion, and in every place, whether they may be many or few! He does not despise the day of small things. Where even "two or three are gathered together in his name," whether they be rich or poor, learned or illiterate, he is certainly "in the midst of them."

3. *By the efficacy of his presence.* Without the presence of Christ, the assemblies of his followers would ever be barren and unprofitable. But, according to his word he is always with them, and that to do them good. He assists their devotions—answers their prayers—and fulfils their desires. He possesses an infinite plenitude of grace, and in his ordinances he communicates his blessings to them that unite in his worship. He enlightens the ignorant—pardons the penitent—strengthens the weak—succours the tempted—comforts the sorrowful—establishes the wavering—and renders to all a portion of grace in due season, which frequently induces them to exclaim, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

We may infer from this subject,

1. The public means of grace are inestimable privileges, Ps. lxxxiv. 1.

2. The sin and folly of neglecting the worship of God, Heb. x. 25. And,

3. The duty and blessedness of meeting in Christ's name, Isa. xl. 31.

ETA.

XXIX. THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON.

LUKE vii. 12—16

"Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow and much people of the city was with her. And, when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her," &c.

THE age in which we live is unquestionably one of great improvement. While many of the useful arts have attained a degree of perfection unknown to former times, the means of information are becoming more and more general. Through the instrumentality of Sunday-schools, and similar institutions, the ability to read is conferred on a great part of our growing population: and it is hoped that the time is not far distant when every child, in our highly-favoured land, shall be able to read his Bible. In order, however, that this ability may be usefully employed, it is desirable that the value and excellence of the various parts of the Bible be impressed early and deeply on the mind. Works of imagination are usually much read: yet most of their readers will acknowledge that romances, novels, &c., are much less valuable, because much less solid, manly, and rational, than faithful history, which instructs us by the incidents of real life. But of all the examples which history furnishes, whether among philosophers, divines, statesmen, or heroes, none is so worthy of being studied and imitated as that of our blessed Redeemer. Do we admire ardent piety? see John iv. 34. Or filial duty and affection? observe Luke ii. 51; John xix. 27. Or warm and constant friendship? mark the relation, John xi. 5, 23, 36. Or general beneficence? hear Acts x. 38. Or tender compassion? read the text: which exhibits,

I. A CASE OF DEEP DISTRESS; ver. 12.—"Behold, a dead man carried out—the only son—of a widow."

1. God, who intends us for social life, has given us those affections which are necessary to qualify us for the discharge

of the duties we owe one another in society. Without these, although surrounded by a multitude, we should endure many of the wants, and almost all the gloom and sadness, of absolute solitude. Yet this qualification is not without its advantages in times of affliction, bereavement, &c. Rom. xii. 15.

2. The softness of the female sex peculiarly disposes them to the exercise of sympathy; and perhaps parental affection is naturally stronger in them than in men. Hence, "Can a woman forget," &c., Isa. xlix. 15. In the present instance, previous affliction had its full operation on the mind of a mother, who had no husband to sooth her sorrows or to share her distress: and the case which she had watched with sleepless anxiety, had grown more and more hopeless, till it terminated in death.

3. There is something very affecting about death itself, as well as the circumstances which lead to it; especially the death of those to whom, from consanguinity and holy intercourse, we feel particular attachment; and from whom we have been accustomed to receive proofs of affection; and more especially of one who has been the chief or only friend with whom we have been accustomed to consult; on whom we rested for support in difficulty, sickness, age, &c. All these aggravations appear to meet here. The deceased "was the only son—of his mother—and she was a widow." Hence we may learn a lesson of contentment, if our state is not so afflictive. And, however afflictive our case, there is hope; for observe,

II. A COMPASSIONATE INTERPOSITION:—"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her," &c., ver. 13. Here we may remark,

1. *A great degree of interest in the temporal affairs of others may consist with the most devoted piety.* At first view, the awfulness of eternity, the importance of religious experience, &c., may dispose us to think that these things should absorb the whole soul, and constantly exclude from our thoughts every other subject. These may be the sentiments of monks and hermits; but the gospel teaches differently, Gal. vi. 10; Heb. xiii. 16. For,

2. *Humanity is an essential part of genuine religion.* We speak not of that morbid sensibility which would weep at the death of a lap-dog or a kitten; but of humanity, which

would lead us at once to estimate the relative dignity of our fellow creatures, and to sympathize with them in their distresses. Mark the apostle's inquiry, 1 John iii. 17; and the exhortation, Rom. xii. 15; Col. iii. 12, 13. On these grounds we observe,

3. *The Saviour's conduct on this occasion was exemplary*; and intended to teach us that religion refines, and not destroys, our affections. He who wept at the grave of Lazarus, and in view of Jerusalem, "had compassion" on the afflicted, "and said unto her, Weep not." So should we love and pity, "in deed and in truth," Gal. vi. 2; 1 John iii. 18. The Redeemer not only pities, but puts forth,

III. AN EXERTION OF DIVINE POWER; "And he came and touched the bier, and said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise," ver. 14. This was perhaps intended,

1. *As a public unequivocal proof of his divine mission.* The young man was certainly dead; and had lain so the usual time. The meeting appears accidental: there is no intimation that Jesus was known to any of the mourners; so that there could be no collusion. And, in the presence of his own attendants, the "much people" who attended the funeral, and those who might be in the gate of the city on public business, he said, "Young man, Arise." This was certainly intended,

2. *As a beneficent relief of severe sorrow*—the sorrow of one who had previously lost her husband, and now her only son, and in him her hope and stay, and the name of her family. Miracles are not to be wasted when no valuable end is to be answered: but the Lord will step out of his ordinary course of proceeding to do good. Redemption itself is a miracle of mercy. Most of the Redeemer's miracles are evidently of the benevolent kind. And he is still as powerful and benevolent as ever. In the present case, while the young may see the vanity of worldly hopes, &c., and the uncertainty of life; both young and old may learn to expect every thing really good from the divine compassion. For mark,

IV. THE EFFECTS OF DIVINE POWER COMPASSIONATELY EXERCISED; ver. 15, 16;—"And he that was dead," &c.

1. *The natural effect.* The dead revived: and, in proof of it, "sat up; and began to speak;" thus testifying that he had the use of both his bodily and mental powers. Are

you in difficulties, temptation, &c., and are your hopes dead and dry as the bones in Ezekiel's vision? Yet God can relieve you, Isa. lix. 1. Are your hearts hard and dead? He can soften and enliven them. Therefore speak to him in prayer, till he shall turn your prayer into praise, Ps. xxvii. 11—14.

2. *The moral effect.* “And there came a great fear on all.” Much of this, we may presume, consisted in that dread and trepidation which an event so extraordinary and unexpected would produce. But it seems also to include religious reverence, arising from a sense of the power of Jesus, who by a word could raise the dead; and the grace of Jesus, who delivered him to his weeping mother. Of this religious feeling, we have the proper expression, in what may be termed,

V. A SUITABLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT; “And they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up,” &c., ver. 16.

1. This language is similar to that of Zacharias, ch. i. 68, and to be understood as meaning that God had sent the promised Messiah. And, since to glorify God is to confess and extol his excellencies, it may apply to,

2. A confession of his righteousness in all their afflictions, and in his withholding so long the Hope of Israel. Thus Achan gave glory, Josh. vii. 19—21. And thus also should we, Dan. ix. 5—7.

3. An exalting *his truth and mercy*, in sending the *promised Saviour*, and thus visiting his people, to enlighten, protect, comfort them, &c. Thus ch. i. 69—75.

4. A submission to *his authority*. Learn the necessity of thus glorifying him, from Jer. xiii. 15, 16; Mal. ii. 2.

5. An affiance in *his power and faithfulness*. So Abraham was found, “giving glory to God,” Rom. iv. 20. This should be accompanied by,

6. *A public profession of his cause*. Thus the centurion, Luke xxiii. 47. The witnesses of this miracle reported it, ver. 17. We also should be ready to ascribe to God the glory of whatever good is done for ourselves or others, Ps. l. 15, 23, And,

Finally, *A consistent, hearty devotion to his service*. To this purpose is our Lord's declaration, John xv. 8; and his exhortation, Matt. v. 16; as also that of his apostles, 1

Cor. vi. 20 ; 1 Pet. ii. 11, 12. Them that thus honour him he will greatly and for ever honour, Rom. ii. 6, 7.

ZETA.

XXX. THE EXCUSES OF SINNERS FOR NOT ACCEPTING THE GOSPEL INVITATION.

LUKE xiv. 18.

“And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”

It is certain from the oracles of God, that he wills the salvation of all mankind. This appears from the gift of Christ, John iii. 16 ; from the declarations of God, 1 Tim. ii. 4 ; Ezek. xxxiii. 11 ; and from the commission given by our Lord to the apostles, Mark xvi. 15. It is equally certain that all mankind will not be eternally saved. This is evident from the procedure of the general judgment, Matt. xiii. 40—42, and xxv. 41. It therefore follows, that the destruction of those who perish must be the consequence of their own voluntary misconduct. To this it is uniformly ascribed by the inspired writers, Hos. xiii. 9 ; Matt. xiii. 15 ; 2 Pet. ii. 1 ; and to this our text also bears testimony. Here we find a reference to the gospel invitation, in which the choicest blessings of God are exhibited ; a deliberate rejection of this invitation expressed ; and this rejection defended by certain very irrational excuses. The first said, “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.” His absurdity was manifest in his buying the land without having seen it, and in his proposing to go and see it, when, at least, the shades of the evening were becoming prevalent. Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them.” Had he been wise he

would neither have bought the oxen before he had proved them, nor gone to prove them at such an unseasonable hour. And another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." This excuse was as groundless as the others; for a feast was most suitable to their circumstances. It was the feast of a lord, and an honour to be entertained at it. Both were invited to the feast, and they could not be deemed intruders at it. The feast was great, and there was abundant provision for both. There still remained many seats unoccupied, and there was ample room for both. The master wished his house to be filled, and both were sure of a cordial welcome. Our text therefore instructs us to observe,

I. THAT THE GOSPEL INVITATION IS GENERALLY REJECTED BY MANKIND;—"They all with one consent," &c. The truth of this appears by considering,

1. *The gracious design of the gospel.* It is sent to teach mankind the most interesting truths, Acts xi. 14, and xvi. 17; to engage mankind in the most reasonable duties, Acts xx. 21; Tit. ii. 11, 12; Rom. xii. 1; and to enrich mankind with the most desirable blessings, Acts xxvi. 18; Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16.

2. *The general ignorance of mankind respecting gospel salvation;* as to the nature of it, the necessity of it, and the way to obtain it, Isa. lx. 2; John iii. 19.

3. *The general prevalence of vice among mankind;* of ungodliness, of unrighteousness, and of intemperance, Ps. xiv. 2, 3.

4. *And the general want of religious enjoyments among mankind.* Rom. iii. 17; Acts viii. 21, 23. On thus adverting to the design of the gospel, and the general state of mankind, it is too evident that the gospel invitation is generally rejected. Our text also leads us to observe,

II. THAT THOSE WHO REJECT THE GOSPEL INVITATION ENDEAVOUR TO JUSTIFY THEIR CONDUCT BY FRIVOLOUS EXCUSES. The frivolity of their excuses for neglecting this great salvation is notorious. For instance,

1. Some excuse themselves by pleading, '*We and our families need a certain portion of worldly property, and we must attend to the acquisition of it.*' This you may do, so far as is necessary, without neglecting the salvation of your souls. Witness Abraham, who became rich, and at the

same time was exemplary both for personal and domestic piety : see Gen. xxiv. 40, and xviii. 19. And the supreme pursuit of piety, before and above all other objects, is most favourable to worldly competency, Matt. vi. 33 ; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

2. Some plead, '*We have secular duties to discharge, and must perform them.*' This is allowed ; but diligence in the discharge of all relative duties is perfectly consistent with the most exalted piety, Rom. xii. 11. The truly pious are best qualified for the performance of all secular duties ; all such characters being industrious, and frugal, and temperate, and prudent, by the dictates of conscience, Phil. iv. 8 ; Prov. xii. 26.

3. Others plead, '*We are favoured with domestic comforts, and wish to enjoy them.*' So you should ; and may with God's approbation, Eccl. ix. 9.—But consistent piety will not lessen, but heighten this enjoyment. This it does by inspiring its subjects with tender sympathy, Rom. xii. 15 ; with most lovely dispositions, Col. iii. 12—14 ; James iii. 17 ; and with mutual carefulness to please, 1 Cor. vii. 33, 34 ; Rom. xv. 2 ; James iii. 18. And as piety is attended with peace, so sin is attended with misery, James iii. 16 ; Rom. ii. 8, 9. Hence our text leads us to observe,

III. THAT THIS REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL INVITATION IS ATTENDED WITH MOST FATAL CONSEQUENCES. Here we may notice,

1. *These consequences are very dreadful.* They include the punishment of loss, by exclusion from the enjoyment of those blessings which the gospel exhibits ; "None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper," ver. 24. They shall never enjoy the comforts of grace in this world, but remain destitute of pardon, and peace, and liberty, and hope ; and they shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven hereafter. These consequences also include the punishment of sense ; this is the certain effect of God's anger, Ps. vii. 11—13 ; 2 Thess. i. 7—9 ; and God's anger is provoked by this rejection, ver. 21.

2. *These consequences are just.* Because this rejection implies the most daring impiety, even contempt of God ; contempt of his authority, which it disobeys ; of his mercy, which it refuses to accept ; and of his vengeance, which it is not concerned to escape, Psalm cvii. 10, 11.—And the

most shameful folly ; because it desires to be excused from the enjoyment of spiritual sight, and health, and liberty, and safety, and comfort. This their way is their folly, Psalm xlix. 13 ; and their reward is infamy, Prov. iii. 35.

3. *And these consequences are certain*, from God's perfections. From his truth, which engages him to execute all his threatenings, Deut. xxxii. 4, his knowledge to discriminate characters, and his power to execute the purposes of his will, Job ix. 4.

Our text, thus considered,

1. *Conveys solemn admonition to every attentive mind.* It assures us that confederacy in wickedness will not exempt from punishment, Prov. xi. 21 ;—that the general prevalence of surrounding examples will not justify the ways of impenitence. When multitudes do evil with one consent, we must not follow them, Exod. xxiii. 2 ; in such cases, it is our duty and our glory to be singular, Num. xiv. 24 ;—that association in misery cannot alleviate torment, Luke xvi. 27, 28 ; those who bring others to hell will dread to meet them there.

2. *Suggests important inferences.* It teaches us to infer—if the excuses of careless sinners may be so easily answered now, those sinners must be speechless at the bar of God, Matt. xxii. 11, 12.—If civil neglecters escape not the vengeance of God, his avowed enemies have just reason to fear, Jude 14, 15.—If impenitence be so destructive, immediate application to Christ must be our truest interest, Psalm ii. 12.

ALPHA.

XXXI. GOD'S LOVE TO A PERISHING WORLD.

JOHN iii. 16.

“ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

THIS chapter contains a most interesting conversation of the highest importance to mankind in general. That we may duly appreciate this conversation, let us briefly observe the occasion of it,—and the subjects discussed in it.

1. *The occasion of it.* This was a visit paid by Nicodemus to our Lord, for the purpose of obtaining religious instruction, ver. 1, 2. Respecting Nicodemus himself, it appears that he was a truly honourable character, being a master of Israel, or Jewish magistrate. And to whatever mistakes he might have been subject, yet he was serious, and concerned to find the way of salvation; teachable, and desirous of receiving instruction; and candid, ready to admit the truth, when attended with reasonable evidence. Respecting the time of his visit—by “night,” it appears this might have been chosen for the purpose of secrecy, that he might not give offence to his prejudiced brethren; but, if so, it was prudently chosen for the purpose of piety also, that he might find our Lord at leisure to give him all the instruction he needed and desired. Respecting the information he sought, it appears that Nicodemus, on his coming to our Lord, expressed more than is here recorded. It may be presumed, from the sequel, that he requested Jesus to teach him whatever was necessary to be known concerning the Messiah, and that kingdom which God had engaged to set up, and establish about this time. Hence we are led to observe,

2. *The subjects discussed in this conversation.* It seems that Nicodemus, like the Jews in general, had formed very erroneous notions respecting the Messiah's kingdom: as, that it would be a splendid earthly one,—that its subjects must be endowed with a martial spirit,—that the Messiah would establish

it by means of military conquests,—that the benefits of this kingdom would be chiefly, if not entirely, confined to the Jewish nation, and that those benefits would be suspended on an external conformity to the ritual law of Moses. As these mistakes were likely to prove injurious to the best interests of Nicodemus, our Lord kindly corrects them in his communications. Here he shows him, that the Messiah's kingdom is not an earthly, but an heavenly one;—that its subjects must be endued, not with a spirit of martial prowess, but with the spirit of holiness;—that the Messiah would establish his kingdom, not by military conquests, but by means of ignominious sufferings;—that the benefits of his kingdom would not be confined to the Jewish nation, but extend to all the human race;—and that these benefits would be suspended, not on a conformity to the rites of Moses, but on faith in the suffering Messiah. These truths are summed up in our text; “For God so loved,” &c. These words contain a most accurate and comprehensive history of human redemption, and lead us to consider the subjects,—the necessity,—the means,—the benefits,—and the source of redemption.

I. THE SUBJECTS OF REDEMPTION; the world. The doctrine of redemption can be learnt only from the word of God; it could never be discovered by the light of nature, nor by the reasonings of philosophy. From Scripture it appears that by the “world” is meant,

1. *The human race*, including our first parents and their posterity. For it was their residence that Christ visited, Luke i. 78, 79; 1 Tim. i. 15; and it was their nature that he assumed, John i. 14; Heb. ii. 14—17.

2. *The human race exclusively*; not the angelic race, Heb. ii. 16. The angels either never needed redeeming mercy, or they never shared it. None but the human race could ever call Christ their Saviour, Luke ii. 10, 11;—none but the human race are represented as washed in his blood, Rev. vii. 14;—and none but the human race ascribe their salvation to it, Rev. i. 5, 6.

3. *The human race universally, without exception*, 1 John ii. 2; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. This reminds us that our text leads us to consider,

II. THE NECESSITY OF REDEMPTION. This arose from
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our danger ; for, till we were visited by redeeming love, we were perishing. We were perishing,

1. *Through the impurity of sin*, Rom. iii. 23 ; Isa. lxiv. 6. This rendered us utterly unfit for heaven ; both the place and state of it, Heb. xii. 14 ; Rev. xxi. 27.

2. *Through guilt and condemnation*. This rendered us liable to eternal death ;—by just desert, Rom. vi. 23 ; and by God's sentence, Ezek. xviii. 20.

3. *Through subjection to Satan*. To his influence, Eph. ii. 2 ; and to his uncontrolled dominion, 2 Tim. ii. 26. This rendered us averse to God's service, Job xxi. 14.

4. *Through imbecility*. This rendered us incapable of relieving ourselves ; either by wisdom, power, or merit, Jer. x. 23 ; Rom. v. 6 ; Hos. xiii. 9. Hence observe,

III. THE MEANS OF REDEMPTION. These include, the procuring cause, by which redemption is obtained for us ; and the instrumental cause, by which salvation is appropriated by us.

1. *The procuring cause, by which redemption is obtained for us*. This is the gift of God's only begotten Son ; the object of God's peculiar affection, Matt. iii. 17. Who was given to us under various characters ; as our prophet, to teach us, Deut. xviii. 18 ; as our high-priest, to atone and intercede for us, Heb. x. 19—22 ; and as our king, to rule and bless us, Psalm ii. 6. Given thus to us, that he might obtain redemption for us, Heb. ix. 12. Given thus to redeem us consistently with God's righteousness, Rom. iii. 25, 26.

2. *The instrumental cause, by which salvation is appropriated by us*. This is faith in Christ, "That whosoever believeth in him," &c. Faith in Christ implies—Belief in his mission, as our appointed Saviour, John iv. 42 ;—a reception of Christ, John i. 12 ;—and abiding in Christ, 1 John ii. 28 ; Col. ii. 6 ; Heb. vii. 25. Here we should observe, salvation is restricted to believers ; none but such can be saved, however moral, John iii. 36. And it is certain to all believers, however formerly sinful, 1 Tim. (i. 13—16 ; 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. Hence observe,

IV. THE BENEFITS OF REDEMPTION. These we here had comprised in two particulars. Exemption from perishing, —and the enjoyment of eternal life. Those who believe in Christ with their hearts unto righteousness,

1. *Shall not perish.* Their souls shall not perish; for at death they are conveyed to Paradise, Luke xxiii. 43; their bodies shall not finally perish, for they also shall be redeemed, Hos. xiii. 14; Phil. iii. 21. They shall not perish through oppression, Christ will deliver them, Matt. xi. 28; nor through guilt, this shall be pardoned, Acts xiii. 39; nor through impurity, this shall be purged away, 1 John i. 8, 9; nor through weakness, all needful help shall be afforded them, Heb. iv. 16.

2. *But they shall have everlasting life.* A title to it, by adoption, Rom. viii. 16, 17; a meetness for it, by holiness, Col. i. 12; the fruition of it, by glorification, Rom. vi. 23. Such being the blessings which the gospel exhibits, let us observe,

V. THE SOURCE OF REDEMPTION, OR TO WHAT WE ARE INDEBTED FOR IT;—God's love. "God so loved," &c.

1. *Our redemption can be ascribed to nothing but divine love.* Witness the subjects of it; the benefits of it; the price of it; the terms on which it is suspended. Nothing but divine love could so graciously bestow such rich benefits, so dearly purchased, on such hell-deserving sinners.

2. *The redeeming love of God must be most admirable in its qualities.* It must be pure and spontaneous, and munificent, unbounded, unparalleled, and indescribable.

3. *This love should suitably influence our conduct;*—by leading us to repentance, Rom. ii. 4; encouraging our hope, Rom. viii. 32; and exerting us to holy duties, Rom. xii. 1, 2; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

ALPHA.

XXXII. IMPERISHABLE FOOD TO BE PREFERRED TO THAT WHICH PERISHETH.

JOHN vi. 27.

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you : for him hath God the Father sealed.”

FROM these words some idle persons have drawn a pretext for cherishing an unscriptural recumbency on the providence of God ; while others have pleaded them in vindication of their conduct in secluding themselves from society, and in addicting themselves entirely to religious and devotional exercises. But will the words justify either of these proceedings ?—Judge you, my brethren. Can the Scriptures in the same breath totally prohibit our labour, to support our animal life,—and declare that “he that will not work, neither shall he eat ?” Can they at the same time enjoin attention to worldly business, and totally discountenance it ?—Impossible. Consequently, as they do enjoin labour and diligence in all such occupations as are lawful and creditable, nothing more can be inferred from the words of the text, than that our salvation is to be made the great concern of life. And are men required to make their salvation their great or chief concern ? Then, alas for the great mass of men ! For, while many have made it no concern at all, many others have made it but a very subordinate concern ; and but few, comparatively speaking, are making it their chief business. Oh, that we had a voice that would reach all the world, that we might reiterate these words in the hearing of every human being, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth,” &c. From these words we would take occasion to observe,

I. THAT MAN’S CHIEF BUSINESS IN THE PRESENT WORLD IS TO SAVE HIS SOUL. Certainly he was not made for this

life only. And let him be ever so anxious to prolong this life, he cannot do it long. Hence his days are likened to a post, a vapour, a shadow, a hand-breadth, and a weaver's shuttle. And can any man suppose that this short life is all that is appointed to us? Surely, on the contrary, we are warranted in thinking that from the nature of our souls, the extent of our desires, our vast capacity for intellectual improvement, and especially from the word of God, the present life is but the embryo of our existence, the mere porch or vestibule of our being :

‘ This is the bud of being, the dim dawn ;
 Life's theatre as yet is shut, and death,
 Strong death alone, can heave the massy bar,
 This gross impediment of clay remove,
 And make us embryos of existence free.
 From real life, but little more remote
 Is he, not yet a candidate for light,
 The future embryo slumbering in his sire.
 Embryos we must be, till we burst the shell,
 Yon ambient, azure shell, and spring to life,—
 The life of Gods,—oh transport ! and of man.’

Yet, short as this life is, our condition in that everlasting state of being that lies immediately beyond it, will be for ever fixed by our behaviour here ; seeing that our probation and this life will end together. Therefore it behoves us not to set our hearts inordinately upon the present life, nor suffer ourselves to be betrayed into such impertinences and follies as would frustrate the purposes of God in giving us our being. Observe,

II. THAT AN INTEMPERATE PURSUIT OF WORLDLY BUSINESS IS DESTRUCTIVE OF THAT CONCERN WHICH WE OUGHT TO HAVE FOR THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS. But here it will be asked, How shall we know when the pursuit of our worldly business is intemperate? We answer,

1. When it renders that separation from the world, and the things of the world, which is commanded in the oracles of God, difficult and impracticable, without incurring the blame of inconsistency.

2. When it leaves us not a *sufficiency of time for an effectual use of the means of salvation.*

3. When it so engrosses our thoughts as to repel, exclude, and even bar the heart against the entrance of such

thoughts as would lead to salvation. Hence it is that many, who were truly and deeply pious, so long as they had the world in its proper place, have lost all but the profession of piety, by involving themselves in an excess of worldly engagements. And hence, again, it is that others, who have no objections to religion, who profess to esteem it, express a wish to possess it, and even use those means of salvation which have led and still are leading others to a state of salvation, remain the same good-natured, well-wishing, but carnal and wicked persons they ever were. All, therefore, who would attend to the great work of their salvation in a proper manner, must see to it that the love of life and its enjoyments does not so lead them into worldly pursuits as to trench on the great business of life in the way stated above : or, if it has already done this, we must retrace our steps. For observe,

III. THAT WHOEVER WOULD ATTEND TO HIS SALVATION AS HE OUGHT TO DO, MUST LABOUR FOR THE MEAT THAT ENDURETH TO EVERLASTING LIFE ;—"Labour not," &c. Do any ask what is implied in this manner of expression ? We reply, that as every kind of life, whether vegetable, animal, or human, requires its peculiar kind of nutriment,—even so eternal life. Thus the word of God is called our food, Matt. iv. 4. The first principles of this word are compared to milk, the most suitable food for babes ; while the higher branches of doctrinal, experimental, and practical truth, are called strong meat, that requires strong digestive powers to turn it into nutriment, Heb. v. 12—14 ; 1 Pet. ii. 2. And every thing that will either excite in us a desire of this life, or meeten us to enjoy it, may be considered under this image, or as the meat enduring to everlasting life. Thus knowledge, faith, love, and obedience, may be considered ; as without them we cannot attain eternal life. To labour for this meat is every man's duty. By labour we mean something more than a wish, an occasional prayer, or an isolated effort to gain it. Nothing less can be intended by the term labour, than a continued desire, a constant forecasting, and an unwearied and painful effort to acquire it. Thus a man who wants food will labour for it ; submit to any thing that is not dishonourable ; endure any thing that human nature can sustain ; and part with every thing that can be spared with decency, to gain it ; and so should we act in seeking this imperishable food. And observe,

IV. THAT THERE IS THE UTMOST CERTAINTY THAT THIS LABOUR WILL BE CROWNED WITH SUCCESS, SEEING CHRIST IS APPOINTED TO BESTOW IT;—"Which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed." Here we notice,

1. *That God the Father is represented as providing this blessed food.* Who but the father of a family is expected to provide for it? Even so we look for our heavenly Father to provide us with immortalizing food, and this he hath done. For,

2. *He hath sealed Jesus Christ.* This may not improbably be considered as an allusion to the custom of some of the ancients respecting their sacrifices. The sacrifices of the Jews were to be without blemish or spot; the Egyptians, in imitation of the Jews, were to offer perfect victims to their deities; and to such a pitch did their care in this matter extend, that, if the white bulls which they offered to their god Apis had had so much as one black hair discoverable, they would have been unfit for sacrifice. They therefore had proper persons to examine them, and those which they accounted perfect were marked, or labelled on the horns, and sealed with the signet of the inspector. After this manner is God the Father said to have marked out and sealed Jesus Christ as a proper sacrifice for the world; and hath given him to it as that bread that nourishes to eternal life; see John vi. 32, 33, 58. "His flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed," John vi. 55. All therefore who are made partakers of Christ have eternal life, John vi. 54.

3. Some suppose that the text refers to the miracle of multiplying the loaves, as his Father's attestation respecting his appointment to dispense the living bread: and a strong proof assuredly it was, that he was appointed and able to give it.

4. It ought not to be overlooked that his ability to give this bread was not greater than his willingness. This language is to be received as more than a simple declaration of what usually had been done, or of what in all probability would be done; it is rather to be considered in the light of a promise or engagement of that which shall be performed, "Which the Son of man shall give unto you." Not given

to us as that for which we have given an equivalent; but given to us as a mere favour or gratuity.

To conclude,

1. There is no lack of this immortalizing food; therefore none need to despair.

2. As this food will be given to none but believing applicants, therefore let none presume.

3. Let us apply this to ourselves.—What is our state? living or dead?—Let us not forget that our opportunity for gaining this spiritual meat is short and uncertain: that without it we must perish unavoidably. Let us therefore apply for it seasonably, properly, &c.

IOTA.

XXXIII. THE FATHER HONOURS THE SERVANTS OF HIS SON.

JOHN xii. 26.

“If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

EARTHLY monarchs are the fountains of temporal honours: but God is the fountain of eternal honours. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ honours all who serve his beloved Son; and the honour which he confers is as much above what the world can give as the heavens are above the earth. Nor is this all; for, while the honours which men receive of one another are lost in death, those which God bestows, run on for ever. The servants of Jesus are now depised, as insignificant and worthless persons, but ere long they will shine as the brightness of the firmament, Dan. xii. 3.

I. MAKE A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE SERVICE OF CHRIST.

1. *Jesus has high claims on our services.* He created us : for "all things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made," John i. 3. And is it not right that our Creator should govern us? Surely the creature is bound to obey the Author of his being! But he has claims on our services as our Redeemer; "For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's," 1 Cor. vi. 20. It will not be denied, by any man of reflection, that we should serve him who has bought us with his precious blood, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

2. *He is our only Master ;*—"One is your Master, even Christ," Matt. xxiii. 8. Now, as a master has a right to command, and as servants are bound to obey, those who refuse obedience to Jesus, cannot, consistently, call him Master. The church is a house or family, and Christ is the governor of the house. The family is placed under his guidance and government, and every one should do whatever he commands. If his authority be denied, and if his commands be disobeyed, the whole family will fall into disorder; and, when a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand, Matt. xii. 25.

3. *Our Lord is a good Master.* His work is pleasant in itself, and easy to his servants. He says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," Matt. xi. 30. He affords plentiful support to his servants, so that they never hunger, nor do they ever thirst, John vi. 35. And he will give great rewards, Rev. xxii. 14. These are things which are most agreeable to servants. Hence, when we voluntarily enter into service, we inquire after the character of the master; the nature of his employment; the support which he affords; and the rewards which he offers. We are aware that every blessing bestowed by our Master is the effect of grace; but it is as much our own as if we had merited it, and yet we humbly own that we are but unprofitable servants, Luke xvii. 10.

4. *The servants of Christ should obey him in all things.* His work is various; but whatever he commands is absolutely necessary. One serves him in the ministry of the word, and is ready, at his command, to go into all the

world to preach the everlasting gospel, Mark xvi. 15. Another is employed in defending his cause by sound argument, being set for the defence of the gospel, Phil. i. 17. And all are required to practise those evangelical duties which relate to themselves, to men in general, and to God in particular; or, as the apostle Paul says, to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," Tit. ii. 12. Thus all are employed; all are well employed; and all are constantly employed.

5. *We should serve Christ in a right way.* Faithfulness is expected in a servant; and we should be faithful in all things, 1 Cor. iv. 2. Cheerfulness is necessary; a gloomy temper shows dissatisfaction, and is a reflection on our master. Constancy and perseverance are necessary; for "he that endureth to the end shall be saved," Matt. x. 22. What we do, should be done with a single eye; "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light," Matt. vi. 22.

6. *We should be ever ready to obey the Son of God.* Paul the apostle required Timothy to be "instant in season, and out of season," 2 Tim. iv. 2. The ear should be constantly open to hear the commands of Christ; and the heart should be constantly disposed to obey him, whether it be convenient or inconvenient to ourselves. When eastern despots command their slaves, it is a common reply, "To hear is to obey." And shall not we be always ready to obey our Lord, the moment we hear his voice?

II. CONSIDER THE HONOURS WHICH THE FATHER CONFERS ON THE SERVANTS OF HIS SON.

1. *The service of Christ will not procure the honours of the world:*—"If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you," John xv. 19. Learning, conquest, and wealth, are honoured by men of the world; but holy obedience to Jesus Christ is despised and contemned by men in general. But the servants of Jesus sit loose to human honours; they desire the good opinion of the wise and holy, but the good opinion of others is no credit to any man.

2. *If any man serve Christ, he is honoured with the friendship of God.* He has fellowship with the Father and with the Son, 1 John i. 3. Abraham was called the friend of

God; and "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham," James ii. 23; Gal. iii. 9. "The Lord spake to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend;" and he is a friend to the truly pious, who sticketh closer than a brother, Exod. xxxiii. 11; Prov. xviii. 24. The friendship of great men is deemed an honour; but what is that when compared with the friendship of God?

3. *Every servant of Christ is honoured with the special presence of God.* "If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him," John xiv. 23. God dwells with the servants of Jesus, to direct their path in life; to defend them in the hour of danger; and to comfort them in the hour of affliction. His presence is a high honour, of which no man is worthy; but true believers enjoy it as their privilege, through the merit of Christ. God is at their right hand, and therefore they cannot be moved, Ps. xvi. 8. And he is with them in the waters and fires of affliction, Isa. xliii. 2.

4. *The servant of Christ is honoured with a new nature.* All the tempers and dispositions of the soul, which are accounted great and good, are planted in his heart. He is generous to all who are in want; brave in the Christian warfare; pure in all his motives and ends; faithful to God and man; and upright in all his dealings. He is a dear child of God, and, as far as grace enables him, he is a follower of God, Eph. v. 1. And is there any honour equal to this?

5. *Lofty titles are conferred on the servants of Christ.* They are called elect, or chosen; and are precious, or valuable, 1 Pet. ii. 6. They are called sons of God, 1 John iii. 2. They are the bride of Christ, Rev. xxi. 9. All their titles are expressions of real worth; and not like the flattering titles which are given to men, Job xxxii. 21. They are men of God; "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people," 1 Pet. ii. 9.

6. *The servant of Christ will be honoured by the Father in the hour of death.* In death, the honours of the world come to an end; but in that awful hour the good man is highly honoured. God is with him; holy angels minister unto him; he is about to be advanced to high preferment; and he is holy and happy. He can say, "My flesh and my

heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever," Ps. lxxiii. 26.

7. *Honour will be put upon the servants of Christ in the end of the world.* They will rise to glory, 1 Cor. xv. 43. They will stand approved in the day of judgment, 1 John iv. 17. They will be openly invited to inherit the kingdom of God, Matt. xxv. 34. They will be assessors with Christ in the judgment, 1 Cor. vi. 2. Yea, they will judge angels, ver. 3.

8. *And eternal honours will be conferred on them in the kingdom of God.* When time is swallowed up in the ocean of eternity, they will wear the crown of life, James i. 12. They will be honoured with the presence of God and the Lamb; with the society of angels and saints; with great personal glory; with high employments; with exalted seats; and with immortality, Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

INFERENCES.

1. Christian honours infinitely surpass the honours of the world. They are real, substantial, great, and durable; but those of the world are imaginary, empty, trifling, and momentary.

2. Human honours are frequently obtained by war, bribes, flattery, wealth, and power; but divine honours are obtained by repentance, faith, holiness, and the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

3. Proud men will be humbled; their greatness will perish with the world. Therefore, "Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long," Prov. xxiii. 17.

4. We should set a great value on divine honours; and, if human honours fall to our lot, we should be humble. And while we are honoured, either by providence or grace, let us give the glory to God, 1 Tim. i. 17.

SIGMA.

XXXIV. THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN.

ACTS xii. 59.

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

STEPHEN, the protomartyr, was a deacon in the primitive church; and he was “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” chap. vi. 5. He did great wonders and miracles among the people, being “full of faith and power,” ver. 8. Many disputed with him, but were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake, ver. 9, 10. Then they suborned false witnesses, and brought him to trial for blasphemy, before a Jewish council. There his face appeared as if it had been the face of an angel; there he powerfully pleaded the cause of his divine Master; and there he saw the glory of God, and Jesus sitting on his right hand. But they gnashed on him with their teeth, cast him out of the city, and stoned him.

I. THEY STONED STEPHEN.

1. *Stoning was a painful death.* The criminal was led out of the camp or city; an officer went before him, and cried, ‘Such a one is going to be stoned for such a crime, and at the accusation of such a witness; if any can show that he is innocent let him come.’ When the criminal was come within ten cubits of the place of execution, he was exhorted to confess his crime, and when he came a little nearer he was stripped of his clothes. Then they usually gave him some wine, mixed with incense, to stupify and intoxicate him. Sometimes they placed him on an elevation ten or twelve feet high, from whence one of the witnesses threw him down, and the others rolled a stone upon him to crush him to death; but this was not much practised, for generally, the witnesses having thrown the first stones, the people pelted him to death with a savage brutality.

2. *In the case of Stephen there was a horrid display of cruelty and diabolical feeling.* The judges who sat upon his case were unjust; the worst passions of human nature were

inflamed, and raged almost to madness; and all that was done, from first to last, was the effect of corrupt nature and satanical influence. For he was a wise man; a holy man; and a useful man. He deserved the esteem of all; and, if justice had been done to him, he would have been honoured before all the people.

3. *The character of his enemies was vile.* They were proud and haughty, but mean and contemptible. They were filled with envy, like the patriarchs who sold Joseph into Egypt. They hated Christ, and crucified him; and they hated his followers, and persecuted them even unto death. They hated gospel light, because their deeds were evil, John iii. 20. The reasoning of Stephen was cogent; but they were unreasonable men. His piety was evident, and truly admirable; but they were enemies of all righteousness.

4. *Martyrs have been holy men.* Their piety, generally speaking, has been heroical; and persecutors have wantonly thrown away the blood of the best men in the world. Peculiar honours will be conferred on Christian martyrs in a future world. This is evident from the words of our Saviour. Therefore, if we be persecuted for righteousness' sake, let us "rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is our reward in heaven," Matt. v. 12.

II. WHILE THEY STONED STEPHEN HE CALLED UPON GOD.

1. *Prayer is a duty which is always in season, but especially in a dying hour.* It is well to die praying. This duty ends in death; for when the spirit is released from the body it enters into glory, and sings eternal praises to God and the Lamb. How many have died praying, or breathing their wishes to the skies! Prayer in that hour is sincere and ardent; and to a pious soul it is sweet and pleasant. It goes from the heart, and reaches the mercy-seat in heaven.

2. *Stephen had no human friend who could render him any assistance, when his enemies put him to death.* He had no one to help him among men; but God was with him in the "valley of the shadow of death," Ps. xxiii. 4. This is the case, in some measure, with all who are in dying circumstances; for our best friends, while they weep over us, are unable either to support or to deliver us. Happy are they

who can say, with good old Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Luke ii. 29, 30.

3. *We may easily conjecture what Stephen prayed for in the hour of his death.* No doubt he would ask for grace to help in time of need, Heb. iv. 16. He would pray to God for a safe deliverance out of this world of sin and sorrow; and it is certain he prayed for his enemies. In this respect his prayer resembled that of Jesus on the cross. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them:" and Stephen said, "Lay not this sin to their charge." Thus the servant was like his Lord; and the generous feelings of Christianity appeared, when nature sunk and died.

III. STEPHEN COMMITTED HIS SPIRIT TO JESUS.

1. *He was well acquainted with the character of his Lord.* He knew him as God, as man, and as God-man. Without this knowledge he would not have committed his spirit to him. He had seen him in his glory, while he stood before the council, ver. 56. In death he saw him by the eye of faith; and piously committed his immortal spirit to his Redeemer. Jesus committed his spirit to his God and Father; and all Christians commit their spirits to their God and Saviour, who comes to receive them to himself, John xiv. 1—3.

2. *The spirit of man does not perish in death.* This notion is sufficiently refuted in our text. The apostle Paul speaks of being absent from the body and present with the Lord; which would be a most absurd notion if the spirit dies with the body, 2 Cor. v. 8. This is pleasing to a good man; for who would not wish to be with the Lord of life and glory in the heavenly world? Rev. vii. 14—17.

3. *The spirit of man is the property of Jesus.* He has redeemed it with his precious blood, and the Christian has restored it to him as his own, 2 Tim. i. 12. Thus he neither lives nor dies unto himself; but he lives and dies unto the Lord, Rom. xiv. 7, 8. David said, "I am thine, save me," Ps. cxix. 94. The true believer uses similar language, and especially in his last moments; and he knows that a crown of righteousness is laid up for him in a better world, 2 Tim. iv. 8.

4. *When Jesus receives his followers, "they rest from their labours, and their works follow them."* They are taken out of the reach of all their enemies; and will never suffer any

more trials and temptations. They enter into the house of God to go out no more; they partake of the glory of Christ; they enter on a fulness of joy; and on the enjoyment of pleasures which will continue for evermore, Ps. xvi. 11.

5. *Jesus will soon come again in his power and glory to judge the nations.* Then he will bring the spirits of his saints with him; he will raise their bodies from the dust, and they will live with him in an embodied state to all eternity, 1 Thess. iv. 16—18. Then their enemies will be confounded, and sink into shame and contempt, Dan. xii. 2. Do we believe these important verities? Then let us take courage, and follow on to know the Lord! If we die martyrs, we shall have the grace of martyrdom, and the crown of martyrdom will be put upon our heads.

INFERENCES.

1. What a fine example did Stephen leave to the church in after ages!

2. Let us endeavour, by divine grace, to copy after his example.

3. While we do so, we shall carefully attend to our duty as Christians, and leave all events to him whose throne is established in righteousness and judgment, Psalm xcvi. 2. Amen.

SIGMA.

XXXV. THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE GRACE EXHORTED TO CLEAVE UNTO THE LORD.

ACTS iv. 23.

“Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

THESE words are evidently connected with the preceding verses: and the whole paragraph, from ver. 19, claims our

serious attention ; — “ Now they which were scattered abroad,” &c. In this relation we observe,

1. *A display of God's perfections in the extension of his kingdom*, ver. 19—21. Of his truth ; in protecting his church amidst cruel persecution, Matt. xvi. 18 :—his goodness ; in sending the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, Ps. cvii. 20, 21 :—his wisdom ; in promoting his own glory by the malice of his enemies, Ps. lxxv. 10 :—his power, in giving abundant success to the labours of his servants.

2. This account teaches us the true nature of a christian church, ver. 22.—The church is capable of hearing and acting ; for the church heard that some of the Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ, and sent Barnabas to visit them, and confirm them in the faith. Therefore the church cannot mean a building set apart for divine worship, as some suppose ; but a company of professing Christians united to assist each other in seeking the powers of godliness, Acts ix. 31, and xii. 5. As a missionary of the church, Barnabas came to Antioch ; “ Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God,” &c. By what Barnabas thus saw, and felt, and did, we are instructed to observe,

I. THAT THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS TO GOD IS JUSTLY ASCRIBABLE TO HIS GRACE. This is evident from the subjects, the benefits, and the causes of conversion.

1. *The subjects of conversion are sinners* — who have rebelled against God, Isa. i. 2, 3 ; who have cherished and manifested enmity of heart against God, Rom. viii. 7 ; Col. i. 21 ; and who have justly forfeited every favour at God's hand, Lam. iii. 22.

2. *The benefits of conversion are various*. Conversion is a turning to God, and implies both a deliverance and a translation, Col. i. 13.—A deliverance from Satan ; from his service and dominion, Rom. vi. 14, 22 ;—and a translation into the kingdom of Christ ; by the enjoyment of pardon, which entitles them to the kingdom of heaven, Col. i. 14 ; Tit. iii. 7 ;—and of purity, which fits them for the kingdom of heaven, Col. i. 12.

3. *The causes of conversion are meritorious, efficient, and instrumental*.—The meritorious cause is Christ's mediation, through which we are pardoned, Eph. iv. 32.—The efficient cause is the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. vi. 11, which is God's free

gift, Luke xi. 13.—The instrumental cause is faith, Acts xxvi. 18, which ascribes all it receives to the grace or favour of God, Eph. ii. 8; Tit. iii. 4, 5; 1 Cor. xv. 10. Our text teaches us,

II. THAT WHERE THE GRACE OF GOD IS ENJOYED, IT WILL BE SEEN IN ITS EFFECTS ;—"When he came, he saw the grace of God." The grace of God may be, and is seen,

1. *In the tempers of its subjects, or the dispositions of their minds.* Where grace reigns, pride, and unkindness, and unmercifulness, will be subdued, Col. iii. 12—14.

2. *In the conversation of its subjects ;* this is pure, and profitable, Eph. iv. 22; Col. iii. 16, 17.

3. *In the actions of its subjects ;* these are godly, righteous, and temperate, Tit. ii. 12.

4. *All who profess to enjoy the grace of God, should be careful thus to show it.*—On principles of prudence; that their own eternal salvation may be secured, 2 Pct. i. 5—10.—On principles of piety; that God may hereby be glorified, Matt. v. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 11, 12.—On principles of benevolence; that their weak brethren may be strengthened, Heb. xiii. 13; and that their pastors may hereby be comforted, 1 Thess. iii. 8; 3 John, ver. 4.—As an excitement to holy diligence, on this generous principle, our text teaches us,

III. THAT WHEN THE GRACE OF GOD IS SEEN, IT AFFORDS PLEASURE TO WELL-DISPOSED MINDS ;—"When he saw the grace of God he was glad;" and his joy was both pious and pure.

1. *His joy on this occasion was pious.* It was the joy of a saint excited by seeing the grace of God manifested, and sinners saved. He was glad as "a good man," or a lover of mankind; because hereby many were benefited; being raised to a state of safety, happiness, and honour, Rom. v. 1; Eph. ii. 1—6; and the welfare of the civil state was also promoted, Prov. xiv. 34. He was glad—As a holy man; for he was "full of the Holy Ghost." Hence he was glad, because the felicity of angels was hereby augmented, Luke xv. 10. Christ was hereby most pleasingly satisfied, Isa. liii. 10, 11; and God was hereby glorified, Isa. lxi. 1—3. He was glad—As a faithful man; for he "was full of faith." Hence he confidently expected the fulfilment of

God's word, Ps. ii. 8. He beheld in these converted Gentiles the earnest of Christ's universal dominion; and could exclaim with David, Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

2. *His joy on this occasion was pure.* He was glad—though the subjects of this grace were Gentile strangers: it was not the joy of bigotry; and though he was not the instrument of their conversion, it was the joy of self-complacency.

3. *His joy on this occasion was exemplary;* worthy of our imitation. Wherever the grace of God is seen, we should rejoice: without bigotry, this is unchristian; without envy, for this is devilish, James iii. 14—16. Our text teaches us,

IV. THAT CLEAVING UNTO THE LORD IS THE INDISPENSABLE DUTY OF ALL CHRISTIAN CONVERTS.

1. *By the Lord is meant our Lord Jesus Christ;* who is our Guide, Ps. xlvii. 14;—our Sovereign, Matt. xxiii. 8;—our Strength, Ps. xlv. 1;—and our Foundation, Isa. xxviii. 16.

2. *It is the duty of christian converts to cleave unto the Lord.* Cleave unto him by habitual attention, Acts iii. 22, 23;—by persevering obedience, Heb. v. 9; Ps. cvi. 3;—by importunate prayer, Heb. iv. 16;—and by entire dependence, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 6; Jude ver. 20, 21.

3. *All christian converts should thus cleave unto him.*—All, of every age;—of every religious attainment;—and of every station in the church, John xv. 5; Heb. iii. 12.

4. We should thus cleave unto the Lord "*with purpose of heart.*" This should and must be the object of our deliberate choice, Deut. xxx. 19, 20;—of our stedfast resolution, Josh. xxiv. 15;—and of our incessant care, 1 John ii. 28; Phil. iii. 16. Our text teaches us,

V. THAT AFFECTIONATE EXHORTATION IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE STEDFAST PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST;—"He exhorted them," &c. Here we may observe,

1. *To whom this exhortation should be addressed.* As cleaving unto the Lord is a duty required of all Christians, so we find all, of every description, exhorted in the oracles of God. Private Christians are urged to this, John xv. 4; Col. ii. 6; and public characters are also thus stimulated to exertion, 1 Tim. iv. 16.

2. *By whom this exhortation should be employed.* It should be given by all those to whom the care of souls is

committed, 1 Cor. xiv. 3 ; Col. i. 28 ;—and by all private Christians, in their mutual communications, Heb. ii. 13, and x. 24, 25.

3. *How this exhortation should be enforced.* It should be urged, by the consideration of our own total insufficiency, Jer. x. 23 ; 2 Cor. iii. 5 ;—of Christ's all-sufficiency, Heb. vii. 25 ;—of Satan's malice, who purposes and seeks to destroy us, 1 Pet. v. 8, 9 ;—of the dreadful evils to which apostacy would expose us, Heb. x. 38 ; Rev. iii. 11 ; 1 Chron. xxviii. 9 ;—and of the blessings with which God is engaged to crown unfainting perseverance, Gal. vi. 9 ; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

ALPHA.

XXXVI. THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES.

ACTS xii. 24.

“ But the word grew and multiplied.”

WHEN Christ appeared on earth, he was opposed by the wicked Jews ; and, after his ascension into heaven, his holy apostles were opposed both by Jews and Gentiles. The heathen nations raged, and the professing people of God imagined a vain thing ; but the Lord laughed them to scorn, and had them in derision, Psalm ii. 1—4. Herod the king persecuted the church, because it pleased the Jews ; but when he robbed God of his glory, by allowing the people to pay him divine honours, he was eaten up of worms, ver. 23. Let us consider the opposition which was made to the word in those days ; its rapid success ; and the principal means of its extensive promulgation.

I. THE WORD WAS OPPOSED.

1. *By the word we may understand the Gospel of God our Saviour.* This was sent in the first instance to the Jews. Hence the apostle Paul said to the Jews at Antioch, "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent," chap. xiii. 26. It is fitly called a word of salvation, as it explains the cause of salvation; points out the terms of salvation; explain its nature and extent; and offers salvation to all who believe, Mark xiv. 16.

2. *Jewish prejudices opposed the gospel.* The Jews were fond of pomp and parade; they admired the letter of the law; but they were proud, formal, and carnal. No wonder that they opposed that word which required humility, Luke xiv. 11. They could not endure the spirituality of the gospel, Rom. ii. 28, 29. And their prejudices were strong against regeneration; because they were ignorant of its nature, and were under the dominion of sin and death, John iii. 3; Rom. vii. 24.

3. *Heathenish superstitions were opposed to the word.* They had imaginary gods without number; they had priests whom they revered, and who kept them in darkness; and they had an impure worship to which they were superstitiously attached. Christianity took away their gods, exposed their priests, and threw down their idolatrous temples and altars. Can we wonder that they arose up in arms against the word? Their craft was in danger; for the preaching of the Gospel turned the world upside down, Acts xvii. 6.

4. *Human learning was opposed to the word of God.* The Greeks and Romans excelled in learning; but that learning produced bad effects. They were self-confident, proud, and apt to boast. The gospel was plain, clear, and simple; and it rendered all their fine reasonings, and all their displays of oratory, completely useless. Hence they could not endure it. It appeared to them foolishness, and unworthy to be received by philosophers, who imagined they knew more than either the Jewish prophets or Christ and his apostles.

5. *The devil opposed the gospel by his influence and agency on the hearts of men.* Thousands, who were ignorant of his devices, were led by him into error and sin. He stirred up all his servants, whether Jews or Gentiles, to oppose the

word. We have an instance of this kind in Elymas, whom Paul called a child of the devil, because he perverted the right ways of the Lord, under the influence and agency of that wicked spirit, Acts xiii. 8—10.

6. *In spreading the word, the apostles had to endure many grievous afflictions both from wicked men and evil spirits.* They were treated with scorn and contempt; they suffered bonds and imprisonment, hunger and nakedness, hardships and deaths, 1 Cor. iv. 11—13; 2 Cor. iv. 8—11. But they were strengthened and supported by the Lord; and their labours were crowned with success.

II. OPPOSITION DID NOT PREVENT THE RAPID SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL; FOR THE WORD GREW AND WAS MULTIPLIED.

1. *The word is fitly compared to good seed.* Our Lord used this figure in his parable of the sower, where he says, "The seed is the word of God," Luke viii. 11. And the apostle Paul says, in reference to a preached gospel, "We have sown unto you spiritual things," 1 Cor. ix. 11.

2. *This seed was sown by the apostles in prepared hearts;* and it cannot bring forth good fruit unless the heart be prepared. When men repent, and seek the Lord, the fallow ground of their hearts is broken up, Hos. x. 12. The sinner is then convinced of sin; mourns under a sense of sin; and inquires, "What must I do to be saved?" Acts xvi. 30.

3. *When the word sinks into the heart, and takes deep root, it produces holy tempers and holy actions;* and when we abound in these, the word grows in us, and our prayers go up to God with acceptance. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you," John xv. 7. Then we see the grace of God in its wondrous effects. How it grows we know not; but we have sufficient proof of its growth, when we see the blade, the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, Mark iv. 28.

4. *The word is multiplied when many are converted to God by the instrumentality of converts.* One grain may produce fifty, and another a hundred. In those days one convert was frequently the honoured instrument of bringing many to Christ, so that the word spread in all directions. Every member of the church felt it his duty to do what he could for his Lord and master; and, when this is the case, the word multiplies, by the blessing of God, Acts viii. 4.

III. BUT WHAT WERE THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF THE EXTENSIVE PROMULGATION OF THE GOSPEL IN THE AGE OF THE APOSTLES ?

1. *The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, conferred on the apostles, and on many in the church, promoted the success of the gospel.* They spake with tongues, and wrought miracles ; a plain proof that God was with them, and that he was the Author of that religion which they taught and enforced, Acts vi. 7, 8.

2. Another cause of the rapid spread of the gospel in those days was *the burning zeal of the apostles and the primitive Christians.* They were always zealously affected in a good cause, Gal. iv. 18. Under the influence of this principle, they were diligent in the use of means ; they were courageous ; and did all things heartily, as to the Lord, Col. iii. 23.

3. *Divine power attended the word.* This was absolutely necessary ; for without that power nothing could have been accomplished, 1 Cor. ii. 4. Paul planted, and Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase, 1 Cor. iii. 6 ; 1 Thess. i. 5. And, when the word was clothed with divine power, it was “ sharper than any two-edged sword,” Heb. iv. 12.

4. *The holy tempers and the holy conduct of the apostles, and of the first believers, produced powerful effects on the hearts of the people.* They were patient in sufferings ; meek under provocations ; and ever ready to forgive injuries. They were diligent in business ; just in their dealings ; and faithful to their promises. And when men saw their “ good works, they glorified God,” Matt. v. 16.

5. *The unity of the church gave success to the word.* They were closely united in affection, and all aimed at the same things, namely the glory of God, and the salvation of men. Their love to one another was proverbial. When the world saw this, and considered it as a fruit of Christianity, many believed, and turned from dumb idols to the living God, 1 Thess. i. 9.

6. *Persecution promoted the cause of Christ, and gave success to the word.* It discovered the vileness of the persecutors, and the real worth of the persecuted. The one was abhorred, and the other admired. Hence the word of those holy and injured persons took effect ; and it was

frequently said, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'

7. *Judgments poured out on wicked men, and on persecutors, gave success to the gospel.* When Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, "great fear came upon all the church, and as many as heard these things," &c. Acts. v. 11. When Herod died by the visitation of God, the word grew and was multiplied; and when Elymas was struck blind, Sergius Paulus believed the word, Acts xiii. 12.

8. *The united prayers of the church gave success to the word.* All were crying out day and night, "Thy kingdom come." All prayed for the prosperity of the word, 2 Thess. iii. 1. And much prayer must be offered up in one day, if we would see a revival of religion and a rapid spread of Christianity, Eph. vi. 18.

INFERENCES.

1. How widely different was the propagation of Christianity from that of Mahomedism! The one was by the force of truth, and holy example; but the other was by the sword, and acts of violence!

2. The effects of primitive times have reached us in these last days. We have the truth which was then taught: we have Christian ordinances and Christian ministers. Miracles have ceased; but grace still abounds, 1 Tim. 14.

3. We lay no claim to apostolic gifts; but God has opened a wide door, in our day, for the spread of his gospel. Let us imitate the piety and zeal of the first Christians; and may we live to see the blessed days of the Son of man! Amen.

SIGMA.

XXXVII. SIN THE CAUSE OF MAN'S LOSS OF GLORY.

Rom. iii. 23.

“ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

“ For all have sinned !” Who can believe this doctrine ? None who disbelieve the Bible. None who believe that there is any dignity naturally belonging to human nature. But those who take their ideas of human nature from an observation of facts can believe it ; and particularly those who receive the testimony of the sacred Scriptures on this subject. To no other conclusion can this evidence lead us. —The text contains two propositions which are to be established.

I. THAT ALL MEN HAVE SINNED, and,

II. THAT NONE CAN ATTAIN TO THE GLORY OF GOD ON THE GROUND OF THE FIRST COVENANT.

I. IT IS ASSERTED THAT ALL HAVE SINNED. The existence of sin necessarily supposes the existence of law, as sin is the transgression of it ; for, where there is no law, there can be no transgression. And, as all have sinned, all must be under law. All have not the written law. But all show the work of the law to be written in their hearts, in that they are subject to the approval or disapproval of their own minds continually. See Rom. ii. 14, 15. And the law under which all are must be good and equitable, or their thoughts could not justly either accuse or excuse one another. Now, against this good and equitable law, the text affirms that all have sinned. We know that there are persons, and professors of religion too, who deny our right to apply this scripture thus extensively ; affirming it to mean nothing more than that many, very many adult persons have sinned, &c. More than this (say they) the passage cannot mean. But with all deference to the opinions of these persons, we contend that this is completely to beg the question in dispute. And we must say that, if the passage cannot have another sense, it can have none ; for this construction it will not bear, seeing it affirms

the penal consequences of sin to have passed on all. Now unless those who give this meaning to the passage will, in consistency with themselves, affirm that the death which is here said to have passed on all men has only passed on many, very many of the adult part of mankind, but not on all of these, and not on any infants (which we think they will not do); we say that, unless they take this standing, their construction of the passage must necessarily fail; for the apostle assigns the universal prevalence of sin as a reason for the universality of the punishment. Should any press us on this subject, by asking in what the sin of infants consists, we reply, in the nonconformity of their nature to the requisitions of the divine law, which they evince in their early and strong tendency to alienation from God, and to an imitation of evil rather than good examples. That all, infants not excepted, are sinful in their nature, is evident from hence, that all must undergo a change before they can enter the kingdom of God, John iii. 7. And that all adults have sinned, (we mean all who have a sufficiency of understanding to render them accountable to God), we appeal to the reproofs which the consciences of all such persons are daily administering. And what, in our opinion, puts the matter beyond all dispute is, that if there are any to be found who never did sin, these cannot be accepted with God through the mediation of Christ (the only ground of acceptance with God, which is either acknowledged or so much as named in the gospel), but must be accepted with him on the ground of their own innocence; a mode of acceptance that is not only altogether different from, but totally irreconcilable with, that by which the gospel of Christ is designated. These remarks are confirmed by various passages of Holy Writ, see Rom. iii. 10—18; compared with Ps. v. 9, x. 4—7, xxxvi. 1, cxi. 3, and Isa. lix. 7, 8. Seeing then that all who have a sufficiency of understanding to render them accountable to God, stand reproved by their own minds, as breakers of law; and since those whose understandings are not sufficiently opened or matured to minister any such reproof, evince, nevertheless, their want of that innocence which is demanded by law, and much moral pravity that is forbidden by it; hence it is that all must fail of the glory of God on the footing of the first covenant. But this will be still more evident as we

proceed in the establishment of our proposition, which affirms that,

II. NONE CAN ATTAIN TO THE GLORY OF GOD ON THE GROUND OF THE FIRST COVENANT;—"For all have sinned, and (therefore all) come short of the glory of God."

1. Some have referred this to a visible glory, with which they suppose that the body of man originally was covered or clothed. According to these, therefore, the passage means that, as all have sinned, they have come short of this glorious covering. Of this opinion were Mr. Mede, Lord Barrington, and Mr. Fleming. To such an interpretation of the passage we have this objection, that it appears to us extremely fanciful and far-fetched.

2. Others understand by the glory of God his glorious image, moral and political. And nothing can be more evident than that man by sin has come short of this blessed image. But,

3. Others by the glory of God understand the fruition of his presence in heaven. Of this glory they suppose the sinner to fall short through the loss of his meetness for, and so of his title to it; certain it is that both are lost. His meetness for it lost, unless the demands of the law can ever be softened down to the pravity and corrupt inclinations of the disobedient, which is impossible. And this title is also lost, unless the law of God, at the time that it inflexibly demands obedience for the future, can relinquish its claims on the sinner's life on account of his disobedience in time past, which is a thing equally impossible with the former. If then the law cannot cease to demand obedience, and to curse the want of it; and if it is not in its nature to afford any relief to those who are corrupt and guilty, but the contrary; and, in a word, if the guilty and depraved are incapable of enjoying God or dwelling with him, then it is evident that by law hope is cut off from every soul, in that all have sinned; "For whatsoever the law saith, it saith to those that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God;" or rather be led to discern, confess, and deplore its sin before God.

To conclude,

1. Since our guilt is established, how useless must it be to deny it!

2. Since we stand exposed to condemnation and wrath, as sinners against God's good and equitable law, what madness will it be, either negligently or hardily, to make light of our condition !

3. And since the law can furnish no relief, and shuts us up to the faith of Christ, how foolish will it be to continue looking to the law for help, or to deny our application to Christ !

IOTA.

XXXVIII. THE LAW OF WORKS NOT MADE VOID, BUT ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL.

ROM. iii. 31.

“ Do we then make void the law through faith ? God forbid . yea, we establish the law . ”

THE apostle Paul was aware that some persons would abuse the doctrine of grace he had been delivering, or justification by faith without the deeds or works of the law, in asserting that it vacated and nullified the law, dissolved the obligation men are under from it to righteous obedience, and of course tended to licentiousness. This pernicious inference he guards against in the text, where he shows that his doctrine was so far from abrogating the law, that it established it. We shall endeavour to show,

I. WHAT THAT LAW IS WHICH THE APOSTLE HERE SAYS IS ESTABLISHED BY THE GOSPEL.

1. *The law has various acceptations in the holy Scriptures.* Sometimes by the term we are to understand the whole word of God, Psalms i. xix. cxix. It is used to signify only the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses, Luke xxiv. 44 ; and again for all the books of the Old Testament, John x. 34. It is used to express the Jewish or Mosaic dispensation, in opposition to the Christian or New Testament economy :

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” John i. 17. In this sense it is often used in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

2. *But in the text the term is taken in a strict and restrained sense for the moral law, of which the ten commandments are a summary.* This some call the law of innocence, because it was inscribed on the heart of Adam at his creation. It is commonly called the moral law, because it is the rule of our behaviour towards God and our fellow-creatures, as well as of self-government. It was written by the finger of God on two tables of stone, and delivered to Moses when in the mount Sinai. This is the law which the apostle here asserts to be established by the gospel.

II. WHAT THE APOSTLE MEANS BY THE GOSPEL WHICH ESTABLISHES THE LAW. There are two remarkable acceptations of the gospel, both of which we should understand.

1. *It sometimes means the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, which indeed is a mixture of law and gospel.* In this view, the gospel takes in the whole compass of the Christian religion, considered in its reference to Christ. The law and the gospel are interwoven one with another, both in the Old Testament and the New. As Moses wrote of Christ, and so published the gospel, though he chiefly delivered the law to the Jews; so Christ and his apostles did preach and urge the law, though it was their principal work to preach the gospel. This is the general acceptation of the word.

2. *The gospel, in the strict and proper acceptation of it, is the doctrine of our redemption through Christ.* It consists of free promises of grace and glory through Christ, of justification through faith in his blood, of sanctification by the operation of his Spirit, and of eternal life as the gift of God through him. The doctrine that relates to the person and mediation of the Son of God as our Redeemer and Saviour, to the counsel of the divine will in him, and to the whole method of infinite wisdom and boundless grace in the salvation of sinners by him, is properly the gospel, which establishes and confirms the law.

III. EVINCE THE TRUTH OF THE OBSERVATION, THAT THE LAW IS ESTABLISHED BY THE GOSPEL. This will appear if we consider,

1. *That the gospel assures us Christ has fulfilled the law*

as a surety. He was made under the law for this end, or purpose, that he might redeem them that were under the law, Gal. iv. 4, 5. And, being made under the law, he fulfilled it. He says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil," Matt. v. 17. And the apostle says of Christ, that "He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," Rom. x. 4. He was the perfective end of the moral law. He fulfilled the law to perfection by his active and passive obedience. By his active obedience, he yielded a perfect obedience to the preceptive part of the law. The law required a perfect conformity of heart and life to all its commands. Such was Christ's active obedience; it had a perfection of parts and degrees, Heb. vii. 27. He also fulfilled the law by his passive obedience, bearing the penalty the law threatened on the transgression of it. He suffered the punishment due to us for our sins. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet. ii. 24. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him," Isa. liii. 5, 6. This was a full compensation for our breach of the law of God. All this he did as our surety and Saviour; he did it for us; "he died that we might live:" he "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," 1 Pet. iii. 18. By his own voluntary engagement, he came under the obligation of the moral law, in his state of humiliation and suffering, Gal. iii. 13; 2 Cor. v. 21. And, by thus fulfilling the law, he magnified and made it honourable. All this the gospel declares, and therefore by it the law is established.

2. *That it is by the law a sinner is convinced of his need of Christ as a Saviour.* It is by means of the law that the Holy Spirit convinces a sinner of the evil and desert of sin, and of his need of pardon and acceptance with God. There can be no conviction of this sort produced without a law or rule forbidding the commission of sin, and requiring exact obedience. Indeed the Spirit is the efficient cause of this conviction; "When he is come he will reprove the world of sin," John xvi. 8. The Greek word ἐλέγξει, here translated reprove, in this place signifies that the Spirit by uncontrollable argument, or undeniable evidence, will so con-

vince as to silence the adversaries, that they can make no objection, but fully acknowledge the truth of the conviction. But the law is the means or instrument by which the Spirit produces this necessary effect. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," Rom. iii. 20. Paul is an instance of this: he says, "I had not known sin but by the law," Rom. vii. 7. The law in the hand of the Spirit convinced him of sin, and of his need of a justifying righteousness. This he acknowledges: "I was alive without the law;" that is, without the right knowledge of its nature and properties; "but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died," Rom. vii. 9. The apostle, before his conversion, trusted to his own righteousness, imagining it would justify him before God, till he was convinced, by the law, in the hand of the Spirit, of the imperfection and uselessness of it to that purpose. Then he died—saw himself under a sentence of condemnation for having broken the law, and learned the impossibility of reversing the doom by any righteousness of his own. This he testifies: "Through the law I am dead to the law," Gal. ii. 19,—dead as to all expectation or hope of justification, holiness, and eternal life by it. This conviction led him to renounce all confidence in his own righteousness, and ardently desire to be found in Christ. Phil. iii. 8, 9.

3. *That the gospel assures us, when Christ has delivered us from the law, as a covenant of works, he continues us under it as a rule of righteousness or obedience.* Viewing the law as a covenant of works, it has a sanction of reward and punishment annexed to it, promising eternal life to perfect obedience, and obliging to punishment by threatening death to even the least degree of disobedience. Considered as a rule of righteousness, it was given by God, the sovereign of the universe, whereby rational creatures are bound to regulate, guide, and govern all their actions. Now Christ having fulfilled the law by his active and passive obedience, as we have observed, has delivered mankind from it as a covenant of works; meritoriously, by his obedience in his state of humiliation; and all who believe in him, actually in the day of their conversion, Gal. iii. 13. Hence, says the apostle, "Ye are not under the law," considered as a covenant of works, "but under grace," Rom. vi. 14. Ye are not under the condemning power of the law, not under the curse, rigour, and bondage of it. "There is therefore now no con-

demnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," Rom. viii. 1. But all true believers Christ continues under the law as a rule of obedience. He has by his doctrine strongly urged obedience to its precepts, Matt. v.; highly obliged them to it by his death, Tit. ii. 14; and at the time of their regeneration created them to good works, Eph. ii. 10. He then writes his law in their hearts, inclines their hearts to his testimonies, puts his Spirit within them, &c. And thus the law, as a rule of righteousness, is established by the gospel.

4. *That the gospel promises grace to enable us to obey the law.* "Our sufficiency is of God," 2 Cor. iii. 5; "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Cor. xii. 9; "As thy days, so shall thy strength be," Deut. xxxiii. 25. In short, the Spirit of might and power is promised to help our infirmities, Rom. viii. 26. We may be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, Eph. iii. 16.

IMPROVEMENT.

All the improvement intended shall be in two inferences.

1. We see hence that the gospel, or doctrine of grace, is no enemy to holiness; no, it is the greatest promoter of it, see Tit. ii. 11, 12; 2 Cor. v. 17.

2. Since the law as a rule of righteousness is established by the gospel, let us take care to prove our own deliverance by Christ from the law as a covenant, by the holiness of our hearts and lives. It is the property of true believers in Christ, who have an experimental knowledge of the grace of the gospel, to delight in the law of God after the inner man, Rom. vii. 22. Let us have respect to all his righteous precepts, and refer all our actions to his glory. Holiness is our likeness to God, consequently our greatest excellency, and qualifies us for the everlasting enjoyment of him in the heavenly world, Matt. v. 8; Heb. xii. 14.

THETA.

XXXIX. THE DIVINE LIFE OF CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS.

ROM. vi. 4.

“We also should walk in newness of life.”

TRUE believers in Christ are said to be crucified, dead, buried, quickened, and risen with him: denoting their being made partakers, as his members, of the benefits arising from his sufferings and exaltation, as really as if they had passed through the same affecting scene, and were now actually glorified with him. This communion with Christ, and conformity to him in his death and resurrection, is professionally exhibited in the sacrament of baptism, and is what that ordinance obliges them to regard. The expression in the text, “even so,” refers to Christ’s resurrection: as he rose from the dead to die no more, and to live a heavenly life for ever; even so we should rise from sin, no more to return to it, and walk before God in a course of holiness. Christ was raised from the dead to a new life, different from that he lived before, both for kind and continuance; he was raised from a natural to a spiritual life, from a mortal to an immortal life; even so should we live a life of holiness, which bears a resemblance to the life to which he was raised.

Observe—all justified and regenerate believers in Christ are under the strongest obligations, from the death and resurrection of Christ, to walk before God in newness of life. That the life arising from their union with Christ is a new and divine life, will appear from the following considerations:—

1. In respect of the principle from which it proceeds—the *Holy Spirit*. All who are in Christ by a true faith have his Spirit dwelling in them, as the genuine principle of holiness. “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” Rom. viii. 9. God has promised this gift to all his people; “I

will put my Spirit within you;" and for this purpose, to "cause you to walk in my statutes," Ezek. xxxvi. 27. Hence regenerate believers are said to "live in the Spirit," and to "walk in the Spirit," Gal. v. 25, and to "walk after the Spirit," Rom. viii. 1. They live and act from the Spirit as their principle, by his vital quickening energy in them. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," Rom. viii. 14. Here the guidance or conduct of the Spirit is mentioned as both the principle and evidence of sonship. The Holy Spirit is the supreme principle of the life of true believers; and faith in Christ, and the fear and love of God, implanted and animated by the Spirit, are the subordinate principles of it. What a contrast there is between regenerate Christians and unrenewed men! The latter, being strangers to a divine life, act from corrupt nature, or a diabolical influence. They are "in the flesh," are "after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh," are "carnally minded," and "cannot please God." And, in all such "children of disobedience, the prince of the power of the air worketh," Eph. ii. 2. The devil occupies their hearts, and is at work in them as in his own shop.

2. The rule by which it is directed—*the word of God*. The rule by which unconverted men walk is carnal reason, the precepts of men, human laws and constitutions, the customs and example of the world. "In time past," says the apostle to the Ephesian Christians, before your conversion from heathenism to Christianity, "ye walked according to the course of this world," Eph. ii. 2. The apostle Peter, speaking of the former conversation of Jewish believers, calls it vain, and states it to have been "received by tradition from their fathers," 1 Pet. i. 18; not from God, and regulated by his infallible word. But now the rule by which this new life of regenerate believers is directed is the Holy Scriptures, which contain the revelation of God's will concerning faith, worship, and practice; in which all the principles of true religion, and all the measures of acceptable obedience, are fully stated and properly urged. According to this rule, a believer ordereth his conversation, disposes or places his way, Ps. 1. 23. Hence David prayed, "Order my steps in" or according to "thy word," as the only correct rule of action. The regenerate Christian also

fixes the eye of his mind attentively on the life of Christ, as the great exemplar of his own, aware that he is to "be conformed to the image of Christ," (Rom. viii. 29), and knowing that his abiding in him is to be proved by "walking as he also walked," 1 John ii. 6. He looks to him as the author and finisher of faith, and regards his manner of life as the perfect pattern in running the race set before him, Heb. xii. 1, 2.

3. The *end* and *scope* of it. Self is the idol of a carnal man, and the object he has in view in all his motives and actions. "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," Phil. ii. 21. Self, ease, profit, pleasure, honour, applause, are what he pursues in all his ways. Self-denial, enjoined by our Saviour as an indispensable duty, without which no one can be his disciple (Matt. xvi. 24; Luke xiv. 27), is the most remote from his thoughts and purposes. But now, the pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying God, have the complete ascendancy in the estimation, affections, and endeavours of a true believer in Christ; the glory of God, the honour of the Redeemer, is his supreme ultimate end, and the salvation of his own soul the subordinate end of his life. The apostle says of the saints in general, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's," Rom. xiv. 7, 8. Again, "Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him." Of himself, in particular, the apostle says, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God," Gal. ii. 19; and, "To me to live is Christ," Phil. i. 21. To promote the glory and honour of Christ was the utmost ambition of his soul. And he directed all with whom he had intercourse to live in this excellent manner. "Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," 1 Cor. x. 31. Thus this life of believers in Christ is new in respect of its principle, rule, and end.

II. URGE OUR WALKING BEFORE GOD IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.

1. This is the most *honourable* life. It is called "the life of God," Eph. iv. 18: for holiness is one perfection of the divine nature. What can be more illustrious than to

walk and converse with God, to contemplate and adore his infinite excellencies, to know, love, and resemble him? What can give more dignity of character than to regulate our affections, moderate our desires, and govern our passions? What is equal in magnanimity to the conquest over all the manifold temptations of this world, and live in the delightful views, expectation, and steady pursuit of immortal life and happiness? How reputable is such a life as this! Is it possible to live and act to nobler purposes? It exalts us to the high rank of fellow-servants with the holy angels. Among men, it is justly deemed to be a high preferment to be a minister to an earthly prince; but how much superior is it to be a servant to "the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords!" 1 Tim. vi. 15.

2. The most *easy* life. Christ indeed calls his service a yoke, but it is "easy, and his burden light" (Matt. xi. 30), to the new regenerate nature. It causes no pain, but where it meets with unsubdued passions and evil propensities. Whatever difficulties there may be in the way to heaven, yet all things within the compass of vital religion are easy to a devout and spiritual mind. The love of God, reigning in the heart, renders the whole extent of practical piety delightful. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous," 1 John v. 3. The commandments are, in their own nature, mild and pleasant, and divine grace makes them so to the spiritual Christian, so far as regenerate. The discipline of Christ is far from being oppressive; the "eternal weight of glory" will infinitely overbalance the greatest and longest sufferings, 2 Cor. iv. 17; Rom. viii. 18.

3. The most *comfortable* and *delectable*. Of all the various methods of living, none is equally pleasant. Solomon, who after he had given himself to the world and sin, trying all the forbidden walks of sense, in his penitential reflections says, that those pleasures were more bitter than death. And therefore he pronounced every way of living but that of sincere practical godliness, a compound of "vanity and vexation of spirit," Eccles. i. 14. In his collection of Proverbs, which are so many moral and divine axioms for the instruction of mankind, we have his experimental encomium of wisdom, piety, and virtue, in whose

train alone true and durable pleasure is to be found. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. iii. 17. To walk before God in newness of life, is to live in the constant enjoyment of pleasure and peace. He who possesses a good conscience has not only good days, but "a continual feast," Prov. xv. 15. The testimony of our conscience (2 Cor. i. 12) is a fruitful spring of holy joy. This caused Paul, when a prisoner at the bar, to triumph, when Felix, the judge on the bench, trembled, Acts xxiv. 25. The primitive Christians, under their heavy sufferings, could "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," Rom. v. 3, compared with 1 Pet. i. 6—8. The subjects of this new life "walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost," Acts ix. 31.

4. The most *safe*. The way of duty is the way of safety. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely," Prov. x. 9. As innocence is associated with happiness and honour, so integrity is our defence and security. They who walk well-pleasing in the sight of God are entitled to the benefit of his protection. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" 1 Pet. iii. 13. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Rom. viii. 31. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," Ps. xci. 1. The "place of their defence is the munitions of rocks," Isa. xxxiii. 16. In a word, "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8.

From this subject we may learn,—

1. The vast difference between nature and grace, a natural and a spiritual birth.

2. The principles of human actions, and account both for practical impiety and good works.

3. The vast superiority of true religion over every other consideration whatever.

4. The best improvement of this subject will be to obtain the principle, adopt the rule, and pursue the end of this new and divine life.

XL. SIN AND DEATH, GRACE AND LIFE.

ROM. vi. 23.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

THAT there is a future world of rewards and punishments is an important truth, which equally concerns every human being. This is evident, not only from the immortality of the soul, and the moral responsibility of mankind, but it is also a doctrine explicitly taught in every part of the sacred Scriptures. The present life is therefore only a period of transitory probation; but the world to come is a state of eternal retribution, in which God will “render to every man according to his works.” The righteous will be received into mansions of glory prepared for them; and “the wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God.” And thus the final states of mankind will perfectly accord with their present characters and doings, whether they be good or bad, 2 Cor. v. 10. The punishment of the ungodly will be the just demerit of their own crimes, as the servants of sin; but the salvation of believers is purely the result of the mercy and grace of God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This is certainly the import of the text, in which the apostle positively declares, “The wages of sin is death,” &c. These words describe—the sinner’s state and danger—the gift of God to mankind—and the gracious method of salvation.

I. THE SINNER’S STATE AND DANGER;—“The wages of sin is death.” These awful words contain a manifest and unalterable truth. From the commencement of the reign of sin, death has been the threatened and just penalty of transgression. Man by sinning ‘brought death into the world, and all our woe;’ for “the wages of sin is death.”

1. *These words suppose an undeniable case.* They are evidently founded on the supposition that mankind are sinners, which is universally true. If we had no sin, we could not merit its wages. But that all are sinners, both

in heart and life, is an unquestionable fact, 1 John i. 8, 10. We are totally depraved by nature, as the descendants of fallen and sinful progenitors, Job xiv. 4; Psalm li. 5; Mark vii. 21—23. We are also highly criminal by practice, having actually violated the law of God, which is “holy, just, and good.” We have sinned in thought, in word, and in deed, and yielded our members, both of body and soul, “as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.” Though all are not equally guilty, all have gone out of the way, and come short of the glory of God; and are therefore justly obnoxious to his wrath, “For the wages of sin is death,” Rom. vi. 23.

2. *These words describe a deplorable state.* The apostle personifies sin, and represents it as an usurping tyrant, reigning over all the ungodly, and rendering them the wages due to their works. The original word, which is here rendered wages, signifies food or pay, and refers to the daily pay or provision which the Roman soldiers received for their services. The apostle assures us that “the wages of sin is death.” It is spiritual death, which includes the loss of the knowledge, the favour, the image, and the enjoyment of God; who is the only “fountain of light and life,” Isa. lix. 2; Eph. ii. 1. It is temporal death; sin having rendered the body subject to pain, disease, dissolution, and corruption; and brought the unavoidable law of mortality on all the human race, Gen. iii. 19; Rom. v. 12. But, above all, it is eternal death, even the everlasting destruction of body and soul in hell. It is not only a final separation from God, but actually suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. The horrors of the second death are inconceivable, unutterable, equitable, and interminable, Matt. xxv. 30, 41; Mark ix. 44; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8; Rev. xxi. 8. Such is the just demerit, direct tendency, and natural consequence of sin; and that not only of its greatest enormities, but of all kinds, and of every degree of sin, “for the end of those things is death.” Oh take warning, and gratefully embrace,—

II. **THE GIFT OF GOD TO MANKIND;**—“The gift of God is eternal life.” This is certainly a message of good tidings and great joy to all people. Though we have destroyed ourselves by sin, in God is found our help and salvation. In the text this salvation is called eternal life, and stands in opposition to death as the effect of sin.

1. *Eternal life is a comprehensive blessing.* As the term death is designed to represent all the dreadful results and consequences of sin, so eternal life includes all the blessings of grace and salvation in this world, and all the ineffable glories of the beatific vision, and fruition of God, in the world to come. It implies the knowledge of God, John xvii. 3—the absolution of guilt, Rom. viii. 1—purity of heart, Matt. v. 8—the indwelling Spirit, John iv. 14—a deliverance from the sting and fear of death, 1 Cor. xv. 55—57—a glorious resurrection from the dead, Phil. iii. 21—and the glorification of body and soul “in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.” Divine grace quickens and inspires the soul with a new and spiritual life, which leads to a blissful immortality beyond the grave. This heavenly life is perfect in its nature, glorious in its enjoyments, unspeakable in its felicities, and eternal in its duration, 1 Cor. ii. 9; Col. iii. 4; 1 John iii. 2.

2. *Eternal life is an unmerited blessing.* It is the gracious gift of God. As sinners, we have no claim to divine mercies. We have departed from him, and by our crimes have justly merited his displeasure, Lam. iii. 22. And hence we can receive no blessing by way of natural right or personal merit, Gen. xxxii. 10. Even life, health, food, raiment, and all temporal benefits have been forfeited by sin, and can therefore only be enjoyed by way of infinite mercy and unmerited favour. But, especially, God freely and unsolicited gave his only-begotten Son, to redeem and save sinners, Rom. viii. 32. And all the blessings of salvation are graciously offered to mankind, “without money and without price,” Rev. xxii. 17. The heavenly state is also called the purchased possession, and is freely given to the saints, Luke xii. 32. Though sinners merit destruction, eternal life is in every respect the free and sovereign gift of God to his believing people, Eph. ii. 8. This is also evident from,—

III. THE GRACIOUS METHOD OF SALVATION;—“Through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Scriptures uniformly ascribe the work of salvation to the divine Being. To the Father as its original source, to the Son as its mediatorial author, and to the Holy Ghost as its efficient agent, John iii. 16; 1 Cor. vi. 11. In the text it is said to be “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This implies,—

1. *Jesus Christ is the appointed medium of eternal life.* For this end he came into the world, and “made reconciliation for the sins of the people.” By his incarnation, obedience, atonement, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, he has merited life and salvation for perishing sinners, John iii. 14, 15, xi. 25, 26; Rom. viii. 34. He died that we might live, and “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” Heb. ii. 14. He is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and the only medium of access to God, and all spiritual blessings, Eph. i. 3; Col. i. 19. Through him the most guilty may be pardoned, the most polluted may be purified, and the vilest may be saved to the uttermost, Heb. vii. 25. He “came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly; that we might live through him, and never perish, but have everlasting life.”

2. *Faith in Christ is the necessary principle of eternal life.* It is only by faith that the blessings of redemption are personally apprehended and applied. “He that believeth is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already,” John iii. 17, 18. It is by living faith that we receive Christ in all his saving benefits, and he is “made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” John i. 12. Through faith in his name, we obtain pardon, peace, adoption, holiness, and heaven, Rom. v. 1; Gal. iii. 26; John xx. 31. He “dwells in the heart by faith, and he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,” John v. 24; 1 John v. 11, 12. The Christian stands, and walks, and lives by faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us.

This subject should teach us,—

1. The awful consequence of living in sin.
2. The necessity of immediate repentance. And,
3. The privilege and happiness of believers.

ETA.

XLI. CHRISTIANS REMINDED OF THE SHAME OF THEIR CARNAL STATE, AND CONGRA- TULATED ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR DELI- VERANCE FROM IT.

1 Cor. vi. 11.

“And such were some of you : but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

“AND such were some of you !” Why, what had they been ? Been ! why they had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, &c.; see ver. 9, 10. Unto these sins the Corinthians were most awfully addicted, which must have proved a very humiliating circumstance to those of them that were converted. Nor was this humiliation to these Corinthian converts alone; for of similar characters, created anew by divine grace, has the church of God been composed in every age of the world. Of some in this assembly and church (most probably) it may be truly said, “And such were some of you : but ye are washed,” &c. In considering these words, we will notice,—

I. THE HUMBLING FACT, THAT THE CHURCH OF GOD IS COMPOSED OF THOSE WHO FORMERLY RANKED AMONGST THE MOST NOTORIOUS TRANSGRESSORS ;—“And such were some of you.”

II. THE WAY IN WHICH SUCH CHARACTERS ARE MADE PARTAKERS OF THIS HONOURABLE AND ADVANTAGEOUS REGULATION TO THE CHURCH OF GOD ;—“But ye are washed,” &c. We have to notice,—

I. THE HUMBLING FACT, THAT THE CHURCH OF GOD IS COMPOSED OF THOSE WHO FORMERLY RANKED AMONGST THE MOST NOTORIOUS TRANSGRESSORS. Christians cannot boast a better birth than other men, than the worst of men, as it respects the corruption of their nature. Nor can many of them boast of a better life in their unconverted state. But without a renewal of their state and conduct, they can have no place in the church of the living God. Men of this

profligate character can scarcely have a place in any department of the visible church, without a professed and a visible alteration. But no man can become a member of the true church without a genuine and an entire change, 2 Cor. v. 17. This change is here set forth under the ideas of being washed, sanctified, and justified.

1. *Ye are washed.* To be washed cannot be understood in this place of either pardon or purification; for then it would be the same thing with being either justified or sanctified, both of which are mentioned with the former, which had not been the case had either of them meant the same thing. We therefore take the washing here mentioned to mean the water of baptism, which had been applied to them on their assumption of the doctrines of Christ, 1 Cor. i. 13—17. And the application of the water of baptism, as the initiating rite into the visible church, laid them under an obligation to separate themselves from the works and works of darkness, Rom. vi 3, 4, compared with 2 Tim. ii. 19; hence, by obligation and in figure, they were cleansed from their former wickedness. But,—

2. *Ye are sanctified.* The word which is here translated sanctified, means (as we are told) separation to some special and holy use; and here from the pursuit of sensual to spiritual things, and from earthly to heavenly, and particularly a separation from the worship and service of idols to that of the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

3. *Ye are justified.* Dr. Macknight explains this being justified to mean deliverance from heathenish ignorance, which justification does indeed suppose; but assuredly it implies a great deal more. It implies the remission of the penalty due to our sins, Acts xiii. 38, 39, compared with Rom. v. 1; which is obtained by faith, as the foregoing and many other Scriptures show. Nay, and it implies or supposes its subjects to partake of a new and holy nature; for now these were righteous persons, the very reverse of what they were formerly, and, as such, members of the church, heirs of the kingdom of God, heirs of that kingdom which they were incapable of inheriting in their former state. And let it be remembered that this change and process of grace was not peculiar to the members of the church at Corinth: for the members of Christ's church, of

whatever age, place, or profession, have experienced the same, in a greater or a less degree. And the way in which they have come to do so, we have to show.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH SUCH CHARACTERS ARE MADE PARTAKERS OF THIS HONOURABLE AND ADVANTAGEOUS REVELATION TO THE CHURCH OF GOD;—"But ye are washed," &c., "*in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*" By some it is strongly contended, that we neither need the merit of Jesus to procure our pardon, nor the Spirit of God to quicken us; but that in the use of our merely natural powers, if we believe God's word, and repent of our wickedness, which (say they) we may do, we shall be forgiven and saved. All this sounds prettily enough; but, alas! it does not quadrate with the word of God. It does not agree with the text; for that tells us,—

1. *That we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.* We know but of three senses put on this phrase, viz. either doing any thing by his authority, Matt. xviii. 20, compared with 1 Cor. v. 4; or doing any thing to his glory, Col. iii. 17; or obtaining any thing of the Father through his influence, or for his merit and sake, John xiv. 13. But as the first of these senses is inapplicable in this case, and as the second is included in the third, inasmuch as being justified by his merit must redound to his glory; of course it is the last of these senses that merits and demands our attention. Is it matter of fact that we are justified through the merit of Christ? As this is a doctrine of pure revelation, we must, of course, answer this question by having recourse to the law and to the testimony. In Dan. ix. 24—26, we are told that he should make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness, by being cut off, and that not for himself; which idea is more fully opened in Isaiah liii. 4—6, in which this being cut off, but not for himself, is explained to mean his bearing our griefs, and carrying our sorrows; or in being wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; in having the chastisement of our peace laid upon him, and being healed with his stripes; in short, in having our iniquities laid upon him. The above scripture prepares us to receive Paul's apostolic view and testimony on this subject, see 2 Cor. v. 21. But here it may, and will, be naturally asked, has he absolutely been made sin for all men? And will all men

absolutely be made the righteousness of God in him? We reply, that he has been made sin for all men absolutely; but that no man ever has been, or ever will be, absolutely made the righteousness of God in him. For, if any one man were thus to be made the righteousness of God in him, then all men might be so, and must be so, or God would be a respecter of persons, which is denied. And if all, or any, were so made the righteousness of God in him, then would this mode of making men righteous vary from and contradict that mode of making them so, which is set forth in Rom. iii. 27, 28, with all formality of expression, and all apostolical authority. In the above scripture, faith is said to be that something (call it condition, or what you please), on which our being made the righteousness of God is suspended, and without which, although Jesus Christ has absolutely been made sin for us, we cannot be made the righteousness of God in him. Should any object,—But, if you are not absolutely made the righteousness of God in Christ, then will you have room for boasting that salvation is of yourselves?—we reply, that the apostle did not think so, see Rom. iii. 27; iv. 1—5, compared with Eph. ii. 8, 9. From the above remarks, we see that it is through the sufferings and death of Jesus, and through faith in them, that we are justified as sinners,—not as persons continuing in sin; for then would our faith be presumptuous and vain; but as sorrowing, reformed, and obedient sinners. If any man speak otherwise, it is either owing to his being shamefully ignorant of God's word, or to his wantonness and wickedness, which prepare him to contradict it, and yet imagine that he is holding by the truth. But,—

2. The text declares that we are justified, &c., *by the Spirit of our God*. By the Spirit of our God, we understand the third person in the adorable Trinity to be intended. And, when we are said to be justified by him, it is not in the same sense in which we are said to be justified by or in Christ; for we are justified in or by Christ meritoriously; and by the Holy Spirit, as the glorious agent by whom Christ's blood is sprinkled or applied, 1 Pet. i. 2. This Spirit is also sent into the sprinkled heart as Christ's representative, to minister assurance and comfort to it, John xiv. 16—18. He is also and especially sent into the sprinkled or justified person, to prepare him as a habitation for God,

Eph. ii. 18. And he himself is, if we may be allowed such a manner of expression, the glorious and majestic occupant of that temple, **1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.** Since then it is by the merit of Christ, and the agency of the Spirit, that men are justified and formed into the church of God; and since none are allowed to belong to the church of Christ, but those who are thus washed, sanctified, and justified, it behoves us to inquire,—

1. Whether we, with all the connection we have with the church and ordinances of God, have undergone this change; for without this what shall we do?

2. If we have undergone this change, let us never forget what we were, nor fail to ascribe the glory of our salvation to its real author.

3. Let the kindness of God to us lead us to desire and pray for the salvation of others, and to endeavour to bring them into the same blessed state as ourselves, seeing God is so gracious and powerful.

IOTA.

XLII. GENUINE RELIGION ILLUSTRATED.

2 THESS. i. 11, 12.

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

THE passions are the chief springs of that activity which every where appears. Of these, hope and fear, as they awaken desire, or produce concern, and in either case create uneasiness, are among the principal causes which determine our various pursuits. But no subjects appear so calculated to excite those passions as the joyful or awful

prospects the gospel opens to our view. Do worldly enjoyments charm us? How much more inviting, "an inheritance incorruptible," &c., angelic company, "fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore." Do earthly things alarm us? The day approaches when we shall see 'a God in grandeur, and a world on fire.' "For the Lord Jesus shall be revealed," &c., ver. 7—10. In reference to this revelation, and its important issues, the apostle says, "Wherefore also we pray," &c., in which he seems to direct our attention to pure religion, in its nature,—source,—producing and sustaining principle,—end,—and measure.

I. RELIGION IN ITS NATURE;—a worthiness. "That our God would count you worthy of this calling,"—of the glorification mentioned ver. 10. While we should carefully guard against self-righteousness, we should be equally watchful against an opposite error, which, under the guise of humility, would lead us to abolish some of the most essential distinctions between the sinner and the saint; and should testify with the apostles, 2 Cor. v. 14—17; Eph. ii. 1, 10; 1 Thess. ii. 11, 12; 1 John iii. 9. Agreeably to these declarations is the character in ver. 10. "His saints," in whom he shall be glorified. This expresses,

1. *Their previous worthiness of condition.* They are in this life sanctified ones: that is, set apart from common uses, from worldliness as well as wickedness, to sacred service, 1 Pet. ii. 9; Heb. xiii. 15; Rom. xii. 1; 1 Cor. x. 31. Nay, they are children, heirs of God, &c., Gal. iv. 4—7. And having been thus honourably related, and so consistently employed, they are accounted worthy to be approved and exalted, Matt. xxv. 23, 34—36, 40. And it expresses,—

2. *Their previous worthiness of disposition; their aptitude or meetness for glory.* The word saint (from *sanctus*) means chaste, divine, heavenly, as well as sacred. Such are the qualities of genuine Christianity. 'Tis the circumcision of the heart, Rom. ii. 29; a transformation by the renewing of the mind, Rom. xii. 2; Eph. iv. 23; a participation of the divine nature, 2 Pet. i. 4. In itself pure and peaceable, James iii. 17; in its operations godly and benevolent, Phil. iii. 3; James i. 27. Contrast this with the vileness of sin, and with the inherent worthlessness of forms, creeds, &c.

II. RELIGION IN ITS SOURCE ;—the goodness of God ; his free, spontaneous favour. “That he would fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness.”

1. Here is an intimation that all their present religious views and feelings were the effects of divine grace. Hence the apostle prays that God would count, or make, them worthy (Whitby, Doddridge, and A. Clarke) of his kingdom, ver. 5, by fulfilling what he had begun.

2. That all is of grace will appear, if we contemplate man, as existing only in the intention of his Maker, or as really existing in his state of innocence. Neither innocent man, nor innocent angel, can have any rightful claim, or even a continuance of being. But,—

3. Still less, if possible, has fallen, sinful man, any good thing as matter of right. 'Tis of mercy that we are not in hell ; Yct,—

4. 'Tis “our Father’s good pleasure,” that we should get religion, Prov. iv. 7 ; Isa. lv. 1—3 ; Matt. vii. 7—11 ; —that we should keep religion, 1 Thess. v. 21 ; 1 Tim i. 19 ; Rev. ii. 25, iii. 11 ;—that we should improve in religion, 2 Pet. i. 5—8, iii. 18 ;—and that we should continue to improve, 2 Cor. iv. 18 ; Eph. iii. 18, 19. Thus is fulfilled, or completed, his “pleasure” which is “good,”—in its author, operation, end. This doctrine hides pride from man. “Salvation is of the Lord.”

III. RELIGION IN ITS PRINCIPLE ;—faith. “The work of faith with power.” By faith here we may understand the grace of faith, Heb. xi. 1 ; exercised on the word of faith, Gal. i. 23. This is,—

1. *The producing principle* of religious affections and practice, Heb. xi. 6. It is such credence given to God’s declarations as determines the judgment and heart ; and leads the subject of it to fear what is threatened, Heb. xi. 7 ; to do what is commanded, Heb. xi. 8, 17 ; and to expect, seek, embrace, what is promised, Heb. xi. 13, 19 ; Eph. ii. 8.

2. *The sustaining principle* of religious affections &c. It sustains under threats and sufferings, Heb. xi. 35—39. It sustains against the smiles and allurements of the world, Gen. xxxix. 9 ; Heb. xi. 24—26. It “worketh by love,” Gal. v. 6 ; 1 John iv. 19 ; by peace and joy, Rom. v. 1, 2 ; by patience,

hope, &c., Rom. v. 3—5. In short, it attaches the heart to him who is “the author and finisher of faith;” and at times wafts the soul to the upper regions, where it breathes a purer air, dwells amidst brighter prospects, and hears the hallelujahs of the blessed; so that its return to earth is felt as a return to pilgrimage and banishment, which the same faith, nevertheless, enables it patiently to bear, Heb. x. 35—39.

IV. RELIGION IN ITS END;—“That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in (or by) him.” The end is twofold:—

1. *The glory of the Redeemer*:—“glorified in you.” At present: his love appears glorious in his interesting himself about you; his wisdom in instructing you; his holiness in making you saints; his power in preserving and protecting you; his faithfulness in fulfilling all his engagements, &c. This also refers to hereafter, “when he shall come to be glorified in his saints,” &c. ver. 10. “He shall change our vile body, like unto his glorious body,” &c., Phil. iii. 20, 21. The saints shall shine, by reflecting his radiance, and thus bring glory to his name.

2. *The glory of the redeemed*;—“and ye in him.” This may apply to, 1. The glorified bodies they shall receive. 2. The glorious perfection of their minds; freed from all ignorance, error, and moral taint. 3. The glorious distinction with which they shall be favoured, Col. iii. 4. And, 4. The glorious company and mansions to which they shall be raised, Heb. xii. 22, 23; Rev. iii. 21. And it should be remarked, that the glory which they have through him, and that whereby he is glorified in them, is glory derived from him, or resulting to him in his character of Redeemer, as the representative of the triune Deity. This the redeemed feel and acknowledge; hence their praises of both him that sitteth upon the throne and the Lamb, Rev. iv. 8—11; v. 11—14. This is certainly very much for us poor, sinful, wretched, dying worms to expect. But consider,—

V. RELIGION IN ITS MEASURE OR RULE OF DISPENSATION;—“according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This exactly and fully meets your case. For,—

1. Are you *poor, insolvent, destitute of good*? It is

“according to” the freeness of “the grace of our God,” &c. Luke vii. 42; Titus iii. 3—7.

2. Are you *guilty* and *vile*? It is “according to” the riches of “the grace,” &c. Eph. i. 7; ii. 4—7. See “the grace of our God,” John iii. 16; “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” 2 Cor. viii. 9; Eph. v. 2. Nothing further could be given. God’s thoughts are not as ours, &c. Rom. v. 6—12.

3. Are you *weak* and *ignorant*? It is “according to” the tenderness, the sufficiency, and constancy of “the grace,” &c. Isa. xl. 11; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Heb. iv. 15, 16.

4. Are you *still doubtful and distressed*? It is “according to” the former operations of the same rich “grace;” in the cases of David, Manasseh, Paul, and others, who “had much forgiven,” and were greatly blessed.

Careless sinners,—how will you meet that awful revelation? ver. 7—9.

Formalists,—remember that you have to do with him “who trieth the reins and the heart.” Unless the heart be renewed, he will not “account you worthy” of his unsuffering spiritual kingdom.

Penitents,—press into the enjoyment of happy piety. Grace is given you, and “he giveth more grace.”

Believers,—be thankful, and expect a further and more powerful “work of faith;” till “*all the good pleasure*” of divine goodness be fulfilled in you,” Jude 24, 25.

ZETA.

XLIII. THE FORM AND THE POWER OF GODLINESS.

2 TIM. iii. 5.

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

NOTWITHSTANDING Christ had charged his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,

and assured them that the gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations,—and notwithstanding that the miraculous and unparalleled success which attended the preaching of the gospel in the primitive ages of Christianity, must have excited pleasing anticipations in the minds of the apostles of its ultimate triumph, and final establishment,—yet they knew that the opposition from earth and hell, which would be raised against it, would be so various, determined, and perpetual, that ages and generations would pass away, ere the world would be universally subdued unto the obedience of Christ : and therefore, whenever they happen to draw aside the veil, and disclose futurity to view, they not unfrequently describe the triumphs of sin, and the multifarious forms that vice would assume in after periods of the world. To this, St. Paul directs the attention of Timothy in the former verses ; “ This know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come,” &c. How far this description applies to the present time, I must leave : that the sentiments contained in the text are characteristic of many modern professors, I have no hesitation in declaring ; and therefore we will endeavour to understand and profit by these words.

I. GODLINESS HAS A FORM, AND IT HAS A POWER. Godliness we consider another word for religion, or Christianity. Sometimes the term more immediately refers to that particular part of religion which concerns our duty to God ; but here we regard it as including the whole of genuine religion, consisting of doctrines, duties, and privileges. A form is a draught or outline, or sketch of any thing ; or the external figure or appearance of it. The form of godliness is the whole of it that is visible to the senses. This implies,

1. *The practice of moral duties.* By moral duties, I mean the duties of sobriety, honesty, integrity, and charity. A moral man is sober : he is neither a glutton nor a drunkard, but he keeps his appetites in due subjection to reason. A moral man is honest : he avoids all acts of theft and robbery ; he keeps his hands from picking and stealing ; and he pays his debts, and never takes an advantage of another’s ignorance or necessity, in buying or selling. A moral man is true : he puts away lying, and speaks truth with his neighbour ; he who tells lies, either for the purpose of mirth, malice, or gain, is destitute of the form of godliness.

A moral man is charitable, or benevolent ; a hard-hearted, merciless, cruel man, who delights to oppress the poor, can never be supposed to possess the form of godliness ; for godliness never displays itself more fully than in acts of kindness. In the form of godliness we also include,—

2. *Our attention to religious ordinances.* The means of grace are with us very abundant, and we enjoy them unmolestedly. He who has the form of godliness attends some place of religious worship ; he hears some ministers of religion ; he reads the Scriptures ; he pays some attention to prayer, both in public and private : and in the form of godliness we must also rank family devotions, if we are fathers or heads of families.

But godliness has not only a form, but a power ; and though the form may exist without the power, yet the power never will exist without the form. The power of godliness is,—

1. *The power of truth.* ‘Truth is great, and will prevail.’ Truth, even in reference to civil and domestic life, has a most prevailing influence : tell a man that the wife of his bosom, in whom his fondest affections centre, has been suddenly seized by death, and now lies a breathless corpse ; and what a powerful effect will that truth have upon him ! His face gathers paleness, a chill of horror seizes his whole frame, the big tear gushes from his eye, and the bitterest lamentations escape from his lips. And is God’s truth less powerful in its operations ? Here, a poor half-witted wretch, who has no more sense of religion than a brute, strolls carelessly into a place of religious worship, and the truth finds its way to his understanding and his conscience, and it works invisibly until he becomes a new man. See Rom. i. 16 ; 1 Cor. i. 18 ; 1 Thess. i. 5. The power of godliness is,—

2. *The power of love.* Love is a most powerful passion. The ascendancy which it holds in some minds is indescribable ; where the power of godliness is felt, there the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and it is manifested by the secret attachment to God, and inward delight, which Christians feel in worshipping God in spirit and in truth. A formal professor attends the means of grace, but he has no enjoyment of them ; his thoughts are turned towards the world, and the sabbath is a weariness unto him ; but

the Christian, whether he reads or hears the word of God, is ready to exclaim, O how I love thy law ! The words of thy mouth are sweeter to me than honey, or the honey comb. The power of godliness is,—

3. *The power of faith.* Faith is mighty in operation; all the acts of heroism accomplished by the Old Testament saints are attributed to faith. Enoch was translated by faith; Noah built the ark by faith; Abraham offered Isaac by faith; and Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephtha, David, Samuel, and all the prophets, through faith subdued kingdoms, &c., Heb. xi. 32, 33. Faith overcomes the world, 1 John v. 4, 5. Faith quenches the darts of the devil, Eph. vi. 16. And “all things are possible,” &c., Mark ix. 23.

II. SOME PERSONS WHO HAVE THE FORM DENY THE POWER OF GODLINESS. Denial is refusal or rejection; and some,

1. *Deny the power of godliness, by rejecting or refusing the aids of that Spirit who alone produceth a change in the mind.* The power of godliness is the power of the Holy Ghost, and God gives his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. But the Jews resisted the Spirit, Acts vii. 51; and thereby denied the power of godliness. Others,

2. *Deny the power of godliness by disowning it.* Thus we deny a report that may be in circulation. Many, who have the form, but deny the power of godliness, say there is no such thing, laugh at it, make it the subject of banter and ridicule, call it enthusiasm, and look down with sovereign contempt on all who profess it. Sometimes this is done thoughtlessly. Many decide without examination. Were they to search the Scriptures impartially, and consult the experience of holy men, they might be satisfied that godliness has a power, as well as a form. At other times, this is done maliciously. Some belie their consciences, believe one thing and say another. Thus the Pharisees maliciously attributed the miracles of Christ to the devil.

III. THOSE WHO THUS ACT SHOULD BE AVOIDED BY CHRISTIANS;—“From such turn away.”

1. *You cannot avoid all converse with them.* They may happen to be members of your families.

2. *Nor can you avoid all dealings with them.* Men in trade must deal with whom they can, and labourers and mechanics must work where they can find employment. But

Christians should form no unnecessary friendship with them, make no matrimonial connection, nor companionship with them. As Christians,—1st, *Duty should bind you to turn away from them.* The Bible charges you to do it.—2ndly, *Inclination should lead you to turn away from them.* You are people of another character; your tendencies, inclinations, pursuits, and objects, are dissimilar to theirs.—3rdly, *Interest should excite you to turn away from them.* In chemistry, discordant mixtures produce broil and fermentation, till one of them gets the mastery over the rest; and, in religion, two cannot walk together except they be agreed. You can get no good from those who deny the power of godliness, but you may get much evil.

BETA.

XLIV. CHRISTIANS INVITED TO CONSIDER CHRIST.

HEBREWS iii. 1.

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

MAN is a creature formed for contemplation; and God has created an immense variety of objects to gratify his taste: his body is erect and majestic, unlike the beasts of the earth, who have bodies prone and grovelling; with his eyes he can behold the heavens in all their glory and grandeur, and the earth in all its beauty and fertility. He is also endowed with a rational soul, whose power and capacities are designed for eternal improvement: it is his soul that thinks, reasons, judges, and understands right from wrong, and truth from error; and while an incalculable diversity of

objects is presented to the bodily senses to gratify the outward man, a vast assemblage of truths, of science, and of grace, are brought before the mental eye to gratify the inward man. To the most important object that was ever presented to the bodily or mental eye, the apostle directed the attention of the Hebrews in our text; and to him we will endeavour to direct our thoughts, while we consider the passage before us, "Wherefore, holy brethren," &c. Two things claim our attention.

I. CHARACTERS ADDRESSED;—"Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling."

II. ADVICE GIVEN;—"Consider the Apostle," &c.

I. CHARACTERS ADDRESSED;—"Holy brethren," &c. Christians are brethren. Christ bestowed this epithet upon his primitive disciples, Matt. xxiii. 8. And the apostles and first Christians used it in describing and addressing each other. It reminds us that all real Christians are,

1. *Partakers of the same spiritual nature.* Brethren partake of the same physical nature literally; the same flesh and blood; and frequently the same mental qualities; and all Christians are made partakers of the divine nature. And, as brethren, they are,

2. *Members of the same family.* Brethren are the legitimate descendants of parents who are the founders of the family. God has a great family, part in heaven, and part on earth; all Christians are members of that family.

3. *Interested in each other's welfare.* Even the rich man in hell is represented as feeling for his brethren, "I have five brethren," &c., Luke xvi. 28. Christians feel for each other, and they love as brethren. But Christians are holy brethren—1st, *Holy, by the dedication which they have made of themselves to God.* Under the law, the priests, the Levites, the sacrifices, the temple, the tabernacle, and all that appertained unto them were holy, because consecrated to God, and devoted unto his service; and thus Christians are holy, they have yielded up themselves to God and to his service.—2ndly, *Holy by the purification of their minds.* They were once unholy, sin had dominion over them and in them; but now holy tempers and fruits of grace adorn their minds: they indulge holy thoughts, speak holy words, and live holy lives. They are partakers of the heavenly calling.

The term "calling" comprehends the means which God uses to bring sinners to himself. Sinners are far from God, and enemies to him by wicked works. God courts their friendship, and invites them to a reconciliation with him. In order to effect this, the gospel is preached, the Spirit is given, and various means are used. This is denominated a heavenly calling, because it is,—1st, *Heavenly in its origin*. All that tends to make man wiser and better is heavenly, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," &c., James i. 17.—2ndly, *Heavenly in its end*. It leads to heaven; its great object is to make us meet for heaven; and all who make a right use of it will have heaven,—heaven in prospect, and heaven in possession. But they were "partakers of the heavenly calling;" not by merely being favoured with the means of the calling, but invested with the privileges of the calling; they were called, and had obeyed the call; and were blessed with light, liberty, and salvation. Such were the characters addressed. We will now consider,—

II. THE ADVICE GIVEN;—"Consider the Apostle," &c. An apostle signifies a messenger, or a person sent to carry some message, or transact some business of importance. The disciples of Christ were called apostles, because he sent them to preach his gospel, to cast out devils, and to heal all manner of sickness, Matt. x. 1. And, in the primitive ages, there were apostles of infidelity, men who were sent with letters filled with calumnies against Christians and Christianity, in order to counteract its influence.

1. *Christ was a divine messenger*. He is a divine person, "God over all blessed for ever." He was divinely sent: this was the doctrine which he uniformly taught, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me," &c., John iv. 34; v. 23; and vii. 16.

2. *Christ was a voluntary messenger*. He came willingly, Heb. x. 5—9. The undertaking was arduous, but "he gave himself for us."

3. *Christ was a merciful messenger*. He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save their souls; and it was all free, boundless, unparalleled mercy. He is "the High Priest of our profession." The high priest under the law was a most privileged character. He enjoyed peculiar dignity and influence. He was chosen from among men—

was without defect—the supreme administration of sacred things was confined to him—he was the final arbiter of all controversies, and frequently united in himself the pontifical and regal dignities; in all these views, the high priest was typical of Christ. But there are three things which we specially regard in reference to Jesus Christ as the high priest of our profession.—1st, *He made an atonement for sin.* The Jewish high priest went into the holy place once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people; and Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, &c., Heb. ix. 28.—2ndly, *The Jewish high priest blessed the people;*—“On this wise,” saith the Lord, “shall ye bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,” &c., Numb. vi. 23—27. And God hath raised up his Son Jesus, and sent him to bless us: and he not only pronounces words of blessing, but he communicates real, spiritual, and eternal blessings to his people.—3rdly, *The Jewish high priest interceded for the people;* and Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us. He made intercession for transgressors when upon earth: and he now appears in the presence of God for us.

The advice given is, “Consider the apostle,” &c. Consideration is the exercise of thought, not a hasty glance at an object, but a mature and deliberate exercise of the mind. Hence we should consider Christ,

1. *That we know him.* The knowledge of Christ is the most dignified and beneficial knowledge which we can possess; but no man can know Christ who will not consider him.

2. *That we may be grateful to him.* Our obligations to Christ should bind us to be grateful to him; but these obligations can be known only of consideration by him.

3. *That we may keep his commandments.* These we are bound to keep by the obligations we are under to him; but no man can keep Christ’s commandments who neglects the advice in the text. Especially we should consider Christ,

4. *That we may emulate his example.* Christ hath set us an example of love, humility, patience, &c. We must consider Christ that we may know him to imitate him.

BETA.

XLV. THE BELIEVER'S CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST JUSTIFIED.

1 PETER ii. 7.

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.”

THE words of the text are an inference drawn by the apostle from the preceding verse, which is a quotation from Isa. xxviii. 16. The apostle, having expressed his concurrence in the prophet's opinion, respecting the perfect security of those who build their hope of present and eternal salvation on the foundation which God has laid in Zion, proceeds to apply the sentiment to Christian believers, observing, “Unto you therefore which believe,” &c. The text resolves itself into two inquiries.

I. TO WHOM IS JESUS CHRIST AN HONOUR?

II. IN WHAT RESPECT IS HE SO?

I. TO WHOM IS JESUS CHRIST AN HONOUR? We reply, in the language of the text, to them that believe. We observe that the text does not affirm him to be precious to all who know him speculatively, who profess to have faith in him, and who make a fair show in the flesh. But it does pronounce him precious to all who really believe in him. The Christian's faith has revelation for its general object, Rom. x. 17. But as Christ is the grand theme of the Christian revelation, especially as the world's great teacher, atoning priest, and sovereign Lord, hence it is that he is said to be the more immediate object of the Christian's faith, John iii. 36. But no farther shall we be accounted to receive the testimony of the Scriptures concerning him than as our attention is turned to him, than we desire instruction from him, and with the wise man, (Matt. ii. 1, 2, 9, 10, 11,) with Mary, (Luke x. 39,) and with the multitudes, (Luke v. 15,) are found at his feet in the capacity of disciples. And if our faith, by leading us to reflect on our need of the atonement, and on the perfection of it, hath brought us to the feet of Jesus, it will have entirely with-

drawn our dependence from every other object, and left us no plea, no hope, but Jesus. And, if our dependence on Jesus Christ be divine, we shall not make him the minister of sin, by conducting ourselves as though he had not prohibited all evil to his followers, and enjoined all good on them, or as though we were unmindful of his authority. In short, true faith will cause us to learn of him, to come to God by him, and to take his yoke upon us. But in this passage our faith is more particularly led to regard him as the foundation which God has laid in Zion; because the church of God is considered under the figure of a house or temple. Hence a foundation is wanted—and as the temple is to be spacious, durable, and magnificent, hence the foundation must be of good materials, deeply laid, and solidly. Now faith in Christ, as the foundation of the church, is the full reception of the testimony of the Scriptures respecting his sufficiency and perfection as its foundation. And it will not suffer us to settle on birth privileges, on conviction of sin, on a speculative belief of the gospel, on confession of sin, or on outward reformation. It sinks us down to the true foundation, and by really connecting us with Christ, the living stone, converts us also into lively stones, and into integral parts of this spiritual edifice. Now to those who by faith are thus built on Christ, and into a holy temple of the Lord, Christ is, as we have to show,

II. AN HONOUR;—"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious;" or, as the margin reads it, an honour.

1. By believing on him, we attain to the honour of being built on a sure foundation, and so forming an everlasting and a becoming temple for Jehovah, whose house is spiritual, holy, and glorious.

2. To them is the honour, as believers in Christ, of being called, in a better sense than Israel of old, "a chosen generation" (Deut. vii. 6), "a royal priesthood" (Exod. xix. 6), and "a peculiar people" (Isa. xliii. 21), and so of showing forth the praises, or the peculiar and glorious perfections of Jehovah in a more exalted manner and degree. See ver. 9, 10. But,

3. Jesus Christ is an honour to believers, in that he will justify the preference they have given to him as a teacher, the transfer of their dependence from other objects to his

merit, and the expectation indulged by them of complete protection and salvation from his person and government. Those who act thus, shall never be confounded. Hence—

4. As believers in Christ obtained all this honour by Christ, no wonder that he should be highly esteemed by them, or be precious to them. There is no object comparable to him; and therefore would they sooner part with any thing and every thing than with him. They count all things but loss for him, Phil. iii. 8.

To conclude,—

1. Unbelievers will have no benefit by Christ, but will be ashamed and confounded for not believing in him; and for placing their confidence where and as they did.

2. Then is our faith false, or spurious, if Christ is not our honour, and the object of our esteem.

3. Seeing Christ honours believers according to their faith, let us seek more and even much faith.

IOTA.

XLVI. THE DESIGN OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS.

1 PETER iii. 18.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”

THE Christians to whom this epistle was addressed were called, “not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for his sake.” They were scattered throughout various countries, and endured a great fight of afflictions. St. Peter, therefore, as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, endeavoured to console their minds by this excellent letter, and encourage them to persevere in well doing, ver. 13, 14.

For this purpose he urged a variety of interesting motives, which were eminently calculated to cheer their drooping spirits, and induce them patiently to suffer according to the will of God : and, for their special encouragement, he refers them in the text to the infinite condescension of the Redeemer, who suffered as an example of patience to his followers, and also died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world :—For “Christ also hath once suffered,” &c. These words present to our attention—the person who suffered—the sufferings he endured—and the design he accomplished.

I. THE PERSON WHO SUFFERED. It was “Christ, the just.” In this description of the Saviour, “who is the image of the invisible God,” the apostle specifies,

1. *His official character.* The word Christ properly means one anointed, or consecrated to some sacred office. And, as the Jewish kings and priests were consecrated to their offices by the anointing of oil, so Christ, the king and priest of our holy profession, was “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows.” His sacred name, therefore, comprehends his prophetic, his priestly, and kingly offices ; and “is an ointment poured forth” to his people, chap. ii. 4—7. He appeared to Moses by the name Jehovah, and was known to the prophets as the promised Messiah. At his birth he was proclaimed “Christ the Lord,” and his disciples declared, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And he is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ;” in whom all fulness dwells for the salvation of sinners, John i. 14, 16.

2. *His personal character ;*—“The just.” This is equally true of both his natures, as God and man. His divine nature is infinitely, essentially, and immutably pure and holy ; for he is “a just God and a Saviour,” Deut. xxxii. 4. His human nature also was perfectly free from all moral impurity ; and he “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” Though his enemies charged him with evil, they could not convince him of any sin, John viii. 46, 48 ; Heb. vii. 26. He therefore could not suffer on his own account, but for the sins of “the unjust.” How glorious and mysterious is his character ! Essential God and perfect man united in the person of one mediator, 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. His divinity conveyed infinite merit and efficacy into the sufferings of his humanity, when “the

Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." Let us then consider,

II. **THE SUFFERINGS HE ENDURED**;—"For Christ also hath once," &c. The circumstances which are here mentioned, relative to Christ's bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, deserve our serious attention, and distinctly intimate,

1. *The nature of his sufferings*;—"Christ suffered, being put to death in the flesh." He suffered in his character, being wickedly traduced as a wine-bibber, a gluttonous fellow, a demoniac, a blasphemer, an impostor, and a deceiver of the people, Matt. xi. 19; John x. 20. In his sacred person, being insulted, smitten, bruised, scourged, crowned with thorns, and cruelly put to death on the cross, John xix. 1—3; Luke xxiii. 32, 33. In his human spirit, when "he was wounded for our transgressions," in the "hour of the power of darkness," Luke xxii. 53;—when he was denied, betrayed, and forsaken by his avowed disciples;—and when in an agony of bloody sweat he exclaimed, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death," Mark xiv. 34. His sufferings were voluntary, complicated, unparalleled, and meritorious.

2. *The period of his sufferings*;—"Christ hath once suffered." This is a circumstance of considerable importance. The insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifices was evident from the necessity of their frequent repetition, Heb. x. 1—3. But Christ having suffered only once for sins, fully evinces the all-sufficiency and unchangeable efficacy of his sacrifice, as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." By his one offering he made a perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin, and "obtained eternal redemption for us." And hence "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all; who, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down at the right hand of God," Heb. x. 10—14.

3. *The objects of his sufferings*;—"Christ suffered for sins—for the unjust." All mankind are naturally unholy and unrighteous; and yet for such enemies and rebels Christ did not refuse to die, Rom. v. 8. He suffered for their sins, and was raised again for their justification. His resurrection manifestly proved that his death was sacrificial,

and atoned for the crimes of "the unjust," 2 Cor. v. 21. He bore the punishment due to sin, in the sinner's stead; as the mediator between God and man, 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. "He was bruised for our iniquities," and became "the propitiation for our sins." Through his atoning sacrifice, sin is expiated and the sinner saved. And hence every part of salvation is attributed to the blood, to the death, and to the sufferings of Christ, "who bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

4. *The issue of his sufferings.* He was "quickened by the Spirit." Though his human body actually died the ignominious death of the cross, God did not "suffer his Holy One to see corruption." When his enemies appeared to triumph in his crucifixion, and his followers were greatly dejected, at the appointed time he rose victoriously from the dead, "and became the first-fruits of them that slept," Luke xxiv. 1—8. His crucified humanity was "quickened," by the power of his divinity, or the agency of "the Spirit;" that in his glorified manhood he might "appear in the presence of God for us, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood;" as the token of his triumph, and the emblem of his office, Isa. lxiii. 1. This will lead us to notice,

III. THE DESIGN HE ACCOMPLISHED;—"That he might bring us to God." In this consolatory language we are taught two important truths, which deeply concern the interests of our souls. We learn,

1. *The natural state of fallen sinners.* The text justly supposes that we are alienated from God by sin; and this is a fact explicitly stated in the Scriptures, and manifestly declared in the general conduct of mankind, Jer. ii. 13; Eph. iv. 18. Our iniquities have separated between God and our souls; and, like the prodigal son, we have forsaken our heavenly father's house. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;" and are morally far from God and righteousness, by wicked works. Every sin is a departure from the "Father of lights;" and all impenitent sinners are alienated from him, in their minds,—in their wills,—in their consciences,—in their affections,—in their desires,—and in their pursuits, Job xxi. 14; Titus i. 15; Rom. iii. 17, 18. This is an awful state, but not hopeless; "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

2. *The personal efficacy of Christ's atonement* :—It “brings us to God.” However far we may be from him, the sufferings of Christ have opened a new and living way to the Father, Heb. x. 19, 22. He is well pleased in his beloved Son; and by virtue of his sacrifice, all who believe in his name are restored, or brought back to the knowledge, approbation, image, and communion with God in a present state of salvation, and will finally be brought to his eternal presence and glory in the world to come, Eph. ii. 13; Rev. vii. 14, 15. As sin is a moral alienation from God, so the work of grace is a spiritual restoration to him; and a necessary preparation for the enjoyment of him in immortal bliss, Heb. xii. 14. This complete salvation is meritoriously procured by Christ, by whom alone we are brought to God, and obtain eternal life, Rev. i. 5, 6.

INFERENCES.

1. What an evil and bitter thing is sin!
2. How great is the love of Christ to mankind! And,
3. How plain and suitable is the way of salvation!

ETA.

XLVII. HOLY DILIGENCE ENJOINED.

2 PETER i. 10, 11.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for, if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

It has been said, concerning a celebrated imperial commander, that ‘He accounted nothing done while any thing remained undone.’ Doubtless he had observed that on

many occasions, when splendid victories had been obtained, all the advantages of such victories had been subsequently lost, because those victories had not been promptly and steadily followed up; but, time being allowed the defeated to rally and recruit, things soon fell into their former state again. Of this, history furnishes numerous instances. One may be taken from the memorable defeat of the Romans, at Cannæ, by Hannibal, when, 'another blow had broke the Fates' decree, and earth had wanted her fourth monarchy.' Yet even from this the vanquished were permitted to recover; and the conqueror was ultimately obliged to quit Italy. But, if Cæsar thought assiduous perseverance of so much consequence, well may he think so who has to 'train to glorious war the sacramental host of God's elect.' To this purpose the language of Paul, Phil. iii. 12—16; Eph. vi. 10—18; and that of Peter, 1 Pet. v. 8, 9; 2 Pet. i. 12, 13. In the preceding context, the apostle speaks of different classes of characters, who make very different uses of the grace of God; and, in reference to this, he says, in our text, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence," &c.

I. THE VALUABLE OBJECT PROPOSED;—"To make your calling and election sure." The word "calling," as used in this and various passages of the New Testament, means either the act of inviting to the privileges of Christianity, or that state of religious enjoyment and privilege to which we are "bidden." See the parable, Matt. xxii. 2—14, compared with Luke xiii. 24. Sometimes we are directly reminded of the author of this calling, Eph. i. 17, 18; Phil. iii. 14. At others, of the nature and dignity of it, as a high and holy calling, Phil. iii. 14; 2 Tim. i. 9:—or of its object; to prepare us for, and attract us to heaven, Heb. iii. 1. Agreeably to which the apostle tells us, in the connection of our text, that we are called "to glory and virtue," ver. 3; to virtuous glory here and hereafter. It has been thought that this passage may be illustrated by the method in which the Romans recruited their armies. On those occasions, all who were eligible to serve were called to attend a public review. And from among these were chosen or elected the number of soldiers wanted. It is easy to perceive how a person might, by framing excuses on the one hand, or by putting himself in the best condition

on the other, procure his rejection or election. Accordingly, Peter charges us to make our election as well as our calling sure. Election means the choosing of a person to fill a certain office, to execute certain trusts, or to enjoy certain privileges :—as Jeremiah to the prophetic, and Paul to the apostolic office ; and the Jews formerly, and now the Gentiles, to peculiar religious advantages. And concerning it, as well as our Christian calling, we may observe,

1. *It is of free unmerited favour*, 1 Thess. i. 4 ; Titus iii. 4—7 ; 1 Pet. i. 2—4. And yet,

2. *The freeness and abundance of grace do not supersede our endeavours*, ver. 8—10. Therefore, in order to secure what God has graciously put into our power, we should consider,

II. THE MEANS RECOMMENDED ;—“ Wherefore, give diligence,”

1. *In application for grace*. If we consider the christian life as a course of “labour,” or a running, or wrestling, or “warfare,” it will appear that our strength had need to be often renewed. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly,” chap. ii. 9 ; and worketh in us “to will and to do.” Yet “he giveth more grace” in answer to prayer. Therefore “wait upon him,” Ps. lxii. 5—8. In all the means of grace be punctual, earnest, expecting. The experience of those who stand, and of those who have fallen, recommend this, “Give diligence.”

2. *In application of grace*. Comment on ver. 5—7. “Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue,” &c. Add one grace to another ; and abound in every grace, ver. 8. Mark the utility of this ; “ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful” in that which is above all things valuable, Phil. iii. 8. See this farther illustrated in the parable of the talents, Matt. xxv. 19—29. “To him that (practically) hath shall be given.” If we would “grow in grace,” we must exercise grace. Mark also the necessity of this, ver. 9. “He that lacketh these things” becomes the dupe of his own indolence and self-indulgence. Through a neglect of duty, in seeking and using grace, Eli lost the priesthood, 1 Sam. ii. 30 ; and Saul the kingdom of Israel, 1 Sam. xv. 23. And in a similar manner the Israelites also forfeited their election ; and so the Gentiles, elected in their room, are in danger of forfeiting theirs, Rom. xi. 17—22. The

use of these things, "written for our admonition," we may see in Paul's address to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. x. 1—12. With this pressing and personal exhortation, let us turn again to our text; and consider,

III. THE MOTIVES EMPLOYED;—"For if ye do these things," &c. To promote a patient continuance in well-doing, the apostle here proposes,

1. *Their preservation from evil*;—"Ye shall never fall:"—never fall into utter, endless ruin. This argument is employed with the Hebrews, chap. x. 24—39. And against this we are cautioned, not only in this epistle, chap. ii. 18—22; but also Mark ix. 50; Luke xiv. 34; John xv. 5, 6. But, if there were no danger on this ground, it were an important matter to prevent a fall into error and sin; and into the darkness and misery of a bewildered state. How many, 1st, Neglect to add virtue to knowledge, &c.: and hence,—2ndly, Lose the comfortable witness of their adoption: and are therefore,—3rdly, "Blind" (winking or weak sighted), 'not able to look truth in the face.' (See A. Clarke, *in loc.*) Whence follows, 4thly, Doubtfulness, forgetfulness, and perhaps denial of their being "purged from their old sins:" if not also a denial of "the Lord that bought them." A dreary state of destitution.

2. *Their entrance into heavenly bliss*;—"For so an entrance shall be administered," &c. Whether there is here an allusion to the entry of conquerors, in triumph, into a city, on their return from a successful campaign; or whether the apostle considers the Christian as 'contending for his native heaven,' against opposing foes, who would prevent his approach to it, but whom he overcomes; in either case,—1st, An entrance is gained; an entrance to safety, rest, and home.—2ndly, "An entrance shall be ministered" by ministering spirits (Heb. i. 14), who shall say, "Lift up your heads, ye gates, that the righteous nation," &c., Isa. xxvi. 2.—It shall, 3dly, be "ministered abundantly:" without opposition, difficulty, or reluctance; and with numerous attendants and spectators.—And, 4thly, It is an entrance into "*the kingdom of our LORD AND SAVIOUR*," who has purchased it, and will welcome us to it, &c.:—and of the pleasures of which, the purity suits the holy nature of the renewed soul; and the plenitude and perpetuity its still expanding and everlasting desires. In which

we shall have the Saviour's presence, Rev. vii. 17; "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore." If men give diligence to secure their election to places of temporal emolument or honour, much more should we, when so much depends, Isa. li. 11.

ZETA.

XLVIII. THE SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST EVINCED BY A PRACTICAL ATTENTION TO HIS COMMANDMENTS.

1 JOHN ii. 3.

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."

THE design of the apostle John in this epistle is to excite Christians to the study of holiness towards God, and usefulness towards men, especially their brethren in the faith; and, in order to this, to get and cultivate the noble principles of love to the former and charity towards the latter; these being not only ornamental of the Christian profession, but admirably adapted to promote the salvation of the soul. In the text, the apostle introduces one of the surest proofs that Christians can give of their having the knowledge of Christ, both as their propitiation and advocate: "hereby we do know that we know him," know our interest in his sacrifice and intercession, "if we keep his commandments," if we sincerely regard and faithfully conduct ourselves by the discoveries of his will.

Observe—obedience to the commands of Christ is the most certain evidence of professing Christians possessing the saving knowledge of him. In discussing this subject, we shall,

I. GIVE A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE NATURE OF THE SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

1. It is not a mere speculative knowledge. The external

revelation of Christ, contained in the holy Scriptures, furnishes us with a true and faithful account; but the mere exercise of the understanding on those doctrines which embrace the system of redemption and salvation, falls short of this knowledge. The evil spirit could say, "Jesus I know." The devils know Christ speculatively; they believe the record God has given of him, and tremble, James ii. 19. Many of the members of the visible church, who neither sincerely love nor practically obey Christ, have, however, a large stock of the doctrinal knowledge of him. While we cannot but speak highly of this cultivation of the human mind, yet it is much to be lamented that any persons should confine themselves to it, and never launch forth into the deeps of experimental religion.

2. The saving knowledge of Christ is a real, internal, spiritual revelation or manifestation of him to the soul, by the Spirit of God in the day of conversion. The apostle Paul asserts that, at his conversion, Christ was revealed in him, Gal. i. 16. It is the work of the Spirit to reveal Christ in the human soul. He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to believers, John xvi. 14. Spiritual illumination in the knowledge of Christ is the unction which they have received from the Holy Spirit, 1 John ii. 20. Both the knowledge of Christ received at the first manifestation of him to the soul, and all the increased degrees of it afterwards, are from the Spirit. Hence the apostle designates him "The Spirit of wisdom and revelation;" and prays for a larger measure of his illuminating influence to the Christians at Ephesus, Eph. i. 17.

3. The spiritual knowledge of Christ is the best and most excellent that can come within the reach of man. The apostle Paul, whose active mind had, at Tarsus, been initiated into the stores of Grecian and Roman learning, and in Jerusalem, at the feet of the renowned Gamaliel, into Jewish literature and theology, has given us his own views on this ennobling subject, in these words,—“Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ,” Phil. iii. 8. This knowledge, we see, he thought so excellent as to reckon all things but loss for the sake of it. It is the privilege and delight of the highest classes of creatures, the most matured Christians on

earth, and the glorified saints and angels in heaven. No other knowledge, of letters, science, arts, can make us happy without this, and nothing can render those miserable who have it.

4. The saving knowledge of Christ which believers have on earth is greatly inferior as to degree, and different as to the manner of knowing, from what they will have in heaven. Here they know him but imperfectly; there their knowledge of him will be perfect—not fully comprehensive and adequate, but as much as their finite minds can receive. “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But, when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away,” 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10. On earth their knowledge of Christ is mediate; in heaven it will be immediate. “For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known,” ver. 12. Here they see Christ by faith; “We walk by faith,” says the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 7; hereafter they will see him, in his human nature, with the eyes of the body; “In my flesh shall I see God my Redeemer,” Job xix. 25, 26.

5. The spiritual saving knowledge of Christ produces distinguishing effects—effects which distinguish it from all other knowledge. It humbles those who have it. The speculative knowledge of Christ and divine things puffs up the mind with pride and conceit, 1 Cor. viii. 1—swells it with vanity; but the saving knowledge of Christ humbles the soul in self-abasement. When the prophet saw the glory of Christ, he was deeply impressed with a sense of his own meanness and baseness. “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,” Isa. vi. 5. Sound divines call this the glory of Christ, which the prophet saw, because the evangelist tells us so. “These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory and spake of him,” John xii. 41. A spiritual sight of Christ discovers so much glory in him, and is connected with a view of such vileness in the beholder, as causes him to exalt his Saviour, and to abhor himself, Job xlii. 6. Such as savingly knew Christ, put their trust in him; “I know whom I have trusted” (margin), 2 Tim. i. 12. They see so much merit and grace in him, as engage their entire dependence on him, for every thing necessary to their complete blessedness.

They love him sincerely; it is impossible that those who possess this knowledge of Christ should not love him; when the whole understanding is opened, the heart burns with a sacred flame. This knowledge is transforming; it changes believers into his likeness (2 Cor. iii. 18) in holiness, meekness, patience, love, and every other imitable perfection.

II. SHOW WHAT SORT OF OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDS OF CHRIST IS THE UNDOUBTED EVIDENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF HIM.

1. It is *heartly*, springing from love to Christ, as the governing principle of it. The most exact conformity in life to his injunctions, without the operation of this divine principle, is of no value with him. External compliances, however punctual and plausible, that have not love to Christ for their invigorating cause, are a specious edifice built on the sand, see 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. He can accept of no services that do not originate in affection to him. The apostle uses strong language on this point: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maran-atha," 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

2. It is *voluntary*. David expresses this with regard to his own case: "I have chosen thy precepts," Psalm cxix. 173—that is, chosen them for my rule, and obedience to them is my delightful employment. They who love Christ, can, according to their measure, adopt his own words, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work," John iv. 34. This obedience is free, in opposition to constraint; force has made many hypocrites, but never any genuine Christians. It is prompt and ready, in opposition to a tardy dulness.

' 'Tis love that makes our cheerful feet
In swift obedience move,'

says the excellent Dr. Watts, and it is a truth confirmed and exemplified by the experience and practice of real Christians.

3. It is *universal*. All the commands of Christ are respected; not only those of easy observance, but the most difficult and distasteful to the carnal mind, because his authority runs through all, and his holiness shines in all of them. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I com-

mand you," John xv. 14. "Then shall I not be ashamed," says David, "when I have respect unto all thy commandments," Psalm cxix. 6. It is not indeed perfect in a legal sense, not a sinless obedience, but it is a conformity to the whole commanding will of Christ, that is sincerely attempted. Supreme love to him will bow to his authority; and whatever may be his revealed will, when that is clearly ascertained, whether it be easy or difficult, will readily embrace it.

4. It is *constant* and *persevering*. While the principle of love to Christ exists in the heart, in its proper vigour, it is sure to operate in the life and conduct. The true servants of Christ obey him in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives, according to the obligation arising from their redemption by him, Luke i. 74, 75. And his command to them is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," Rev. ii. 10. It appears that the apostle reckoned he had done nothing, while any thing remained to be done. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," Phil. iii. 13, 14. This is the genuine language of constancy and perseverance. This now is the obedience or keeping the commands of Christ which is the clear spiritual evidence of the saving knowledge of him. And what we have heard on this subject should engage us to study the knowledge of Christ; this knowledge is so necessary, so useful, and so excellent, that it should be the centre in which all the lines of our contemplation meet. Let us apply ourselves to God for it; it is his gift; "I will give them a heart to know me," Jer. xxiv. 7. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. iv. 6. Let such as savingly know Christ, bless God for it; as our Saviour did in behalf of those who were favoured with it, Luke x. 21. It is an invaluable blessing, the evidence of a gracious state, and consequently of a title to heaven, the state of perfect light and knowledge. Let such aim at progress in the knowledge of Christ, 2 Pet. iii. 18; Hos. vi. 3.

THETA.

XLIX. THE LIVING SAVIOUR.

REV. i. 18.

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen."

OUR blessed Lord and Saviour here speaks to his favourite servant and apostle John, giving this admirable and magnificent description of himself. In the text there are three parts in the character Christ gives of himself; 1. "I am he that liveth." 2. "And was dead." 3. "And I am alive for evermore." Our attention to, consideration and admiration of, these truths relating to Christ, are required in the word *behold*. An amen is affixed in confirmation of these things he affirms of himself. All this is undoubtedly true; he who is truth itself puts his amen to it, for the confirmation of our truth, and demands that we set our seal to it by believing it. We shall briefly open and apply the several parts of the text.

I. THE FIRST PART OF OUR LORD'S CHARACTER WE HAVE IN THESE WORDS,—“I am he that liveth;” $\epsilon\gamma\omega\mu\epsilon\iota$ —I am the living one. This refers to the divine nature, and imports several things.

1. *His eternal necessary self-existence*. Christ had an eternal existence, of which he speaks in lofty and magnificent terms, see Prov. viii. 22—31. The apostle says of him, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” John i. 1. And in the fourth verse, “In him was life,” life possessed from eternity; he had a co-eternal existence with the Father. It follows from this, that necessary existence belongs to him. His existence, considered as to his divine nature, is not arbitrary, like that of all creatures, but necessary; being eternal, his existence cannot but be absolutely necessary; and he is self-existent. “As the Father has life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself,” John v. 26.

2. *His immutability*;—the unchangeableness of his being

and life. From everlasting to everlasting he is invariably the same. This he asserts of himself with the strongest asseveration, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am," John viii. 58. Calmet's explanation of this passage is literally as follows:—"I am from all eternity. I have existed before all ages. You consider in me only the person who speaks to you, and who has appeared to you within a particular time. But besides this human nature, which ye think ye know, there is in me a divine and eternal nature. Both united subsist together in my person. Abraham knew how to distinguish them. He adored me as God, and desired me as his Saviour. He has seen me in my eternity, and he predicted my coming into the world."

3. *The most perfect and blessed life.* As he is the living God, so he is the blessed God. God his Father is styled "the blessed God," 1 Tim. i. 11; and in like manner he is said to be "over all, God blessed for ever," Rom. ix. 5. He is possessed of infinite blessedness in himself. This he had from all eternity, before the birth of time or the existence of any creature, whether angelical or human; consequently it is in every sense his own, inseparable from his nature and being. Hence he is not only the author and giver of life; but also the only source and fountain of pure, adequate, permanent happiness to angels and men. Life of every kind is his special gift. Our natural life is from him, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men," John i. 4. The spiritual life of believers is from him, "The Son quickeneth whom he will," John v. 21; and the increase of it is from him. "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace," John i. 16. Eternal life is from him, "I give unto them eternal life," John x. 28.

II. THE NEXT PART OF THE CHARACTER CHRIST HERE ASSUMES TO HIMSELF WE HAVE IN THESE WORDS,—“And was dead.” The former head, “I am he that liveth,” gives to this part the greater emphasis, and makes it appear the more strange. How remarkable that the SELF-LIVING ONE *was dead*! This relates to his human nature, particularly to his body that was dead. His divine nature did not, could not die. He who never begun to live can never die. He is, as we have noticed, an eternal, necessary, self-existent Being, and therefore death could not touch his Deity, which is immortal, and blessed for ever. God only has

immortality essentially and eternally by nature, and not by gift or the will of another.

But in the human nature, which he assumed into a personal union with his divine nature, he died. "The Prince of life was slain," Acts iii. 15. "The Lord of glory was crucified," 1 Cor. ii. 8. He expired on the cross, and gave up the ghost. A barbarous soldier thrust his spear into his side after he was dead, whence issued blood and water, —water from the pericardium, the piercing of which is sudden death. Not only the Sacred Writings, but also the Roman history assures us of the certainty of his death.

It was necessary that Christ should die in respect of the divine appointment. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," Acts ii. 23. See also Rom. iii. 25, viii. 32; in all which there is a special reference to the appointment of Christ's death. His death was necessary, that he might become a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Death was the penalty of the transgression of the law: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," Gen. ii. 17. Hence says the apostle, "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23, and "without shedding of blood is no remission," Heb. ix. 22; without the shedding of the blood of Christ; "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin;" but Christ "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," Heb. ix. 26. If Christ had not died, the curse of the law had not been removed, nor the justice of God satisfied; but he "has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13; and made peace by "the blood of his cross," Col. i. 20; glorified all the divine perfections, and secured the salvation of all that repent and believe.

From the death of Christ we learn that all the great designs of God's government, which were otherwise to be secured by our dying the second death, which is everlasting, are more effectually answered by his dying for us; and thereby a sure foundation laid of our being released from the bands of eternal death, and of our restoration to eternal life.

How safe and happy are all sincere believers, who have fled for refuge to Christ, and by faith hold on the hope set before them! Heb. vi. 18. "There is now no con-

demnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," Rom. viii. 1. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died," ver. 34. "God set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," Rom. iii. 25; and he who has faith may plead the atonement, and rejoice in God through Jesus Christ, by whom he has received it, Rom. v. 11.

Did Christ for our sakes humble himself to the death of the cross, that the sacrifice of his valuable life might become the ransom of ours? How supremely should we love him, and how careful should we be to live to his glory! "He loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God," Eph. v. 2. And the love of Christ should constrain us to live to him who died for us, 2 Cor. v. 14. Let us remember that this was one end of Christ's dying, Tit. ii. 14.

Was Christ dead? then let believers in him prepare to die, and learn of him how to die. Death remains notwithstanding Christ's death; but the sting of it is taken away by his death for them. "O death, where is thy sting?" 1 Cor. xv. 55. And let them die in the manner he did,—die in humility, meekness, silence, and profound submission to the will of God, as to all the circumstances of dying—in a lively faith in God, believing prayer to him, and with ardent love to his people. So Christ died, and in this manner believers should die; this manner of dying is according to the will of God, and glorifies him.

III. THE OTHER PART OF THE CHARACTER OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR ASSUMES TO HIMSELF WE HAVE IN THESE WORDS,—"*I am alive for evermore.*"

1. This likewise relates to human nature; he is alive for evermore in that nature in which he was dead. The man Christ Jesus, who died on the cross, is alive, and lives for evermore. The Scriptures give us full assurance of this. "This same Jesus, whom ye crucified, hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses," Acts ii. 32. "He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures," 1 Cor. xv. 4. Forty days after his resurrection, he ascended into heaven. He was seen of the apostles forty days, and spake to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, Acts i. 3, and then they saw him ascend, ver. 9.

2. The Scriptures assure us that he will die no more. "Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death

hath no dominion over him," Rom. vi. 9. There can be no reason why he should come to die a second time; "for by one offering," the apostle assures us, "he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," Heb. x. 14. He will indeed appear a second time, but not to die, but with all the glorious tokens of life, to raise the dead, to judge and punish his enemies, and to glorify the redeemed, Heb. ix. 28; 2 Thess. i. 7—11.

3. The life he lives in heaven is a life of the highest glory and happiness. See the account of the glory in which he appeared to his servant John, after his ascension, in the context, Rev. i. 13—16. The apostle says, "For the suffering of death, he is crowned with glory and honour," Heb. ii. 9. "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name," Phil. ii. 9. Christ has the honour to sit at his Father's right hand till all his enemies are made his footstool, Heb. i. 13. All the angels of God worship him. The adoring armies of the Redeemer cast their crowns before his throne. It is their joy and felicity to magnify the wonders of his death, to behold his glory, and to celebrate his praise. At the last day, he will be seen to deserve the character he gave himself in his conference with Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life," John xi. 25.

He who was dead is alive again for evermore. Then his death and sacrifice which he offered for our sins are accepted of God. God raised him from the dead to a glorious immortal life, to testify that he had received full satisfaction for the wrong done him by sin; and that in his death there was complete payment made of the debt of punishment mankind owed to his justice. "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification," Rom. iv. 25. So that believers may argue, in the words of the apostle, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life, Rom. v. 10.

This speaks the highest comfort to believers in Christ, and terror to his enemies. He lives to succour and to save the former, and condemn and punish the latter. He has overcome death, triumphed over it, and is able to give his faithful servants the complete victory, and to make them partakers of his own immortality. He is alive for evermore

to pursue the beneficial designs of his undertaking, till he has consummated the final salvation of all who come to God by him. But this life of Christ makes the perdition of impenitent sinners sure. His life and second coming administer terror to his enemies. See Rev. i. 7.

THETA.

L. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ITS MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT STATE.

REV. vii. 13—17.

“And one of the elders answered, saying, What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?” &c.

1. WE find St. Paul observing in his epistle to the Romans, “I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” This important and interesting remark becomes still more striking, when we consider its author. On the one hand, no man knew more of present sufferings than Paul did; for he had long been a great sufferer, in every possible way. On the other hand, no mortal could know more of celestial glory than he did; for he had seen, and heard, and felt its unutterable felicity, when he was caught up into paradise, and the third heaven. His estimate must therefore certainly be a just and true one.

2. With such an example before us it cannot be improper, and may prove conducive to our spiritual advantage, to repeat the estimate. Our text indeed urges us to this exercise, and assists us in it, by calling our attention to Christians’ sufferings in the present life, and their glory in the next. The persons referred to in the inquiry of the

elder are those described in the ninth and tenth verses, "After this, I beheld," &c. This multitude having been seen by John, he felt a desire to become acquainted with their history. The elder, knowing his desire, kindly institutes an inquiry for the purpose of giving our apostle that information which he wished to obtain. "And one of the elders answered, saying," &c. The multitude, thus described, undoubtedly includes the church of God in general, and not merely the martyrs, as some have supposed. And, as it is the church of God at large which is here represented, so it is also exhibited to us in its twofold state, as militant and triumphant. In this order let us therefore observe it.

I. IN ITS MILITANT STATE. By its militant state is meant its state in this world, while engaged in conflicts, and exposed to sufferings. Here observe,

1. *What Christians do in this state*;—"They wash their robes," &c. This teaches us that *mankind are polluted till they become interested in Christ*. They are polluted by sinful propensities, or sinful deportment and sinful habits, see Ps. xiv. 2, 3; Tit. i. 15. We further learn that the saints' purity is obtained through the blood of the Lamb. By the Lamb is meant Christ, the atoning Lamb of God, John i. 29; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. His blood means all his mediatorial sufferings in our behalf, 1 Pet. iii. 18. "His blood cleanses us from all sin," 1 John i. 7. This it does by procuring pardon, by which we are cleansed from the guilt of sin, Col. i. 14, and by procuring the Holy Spirit's influence, by which we are cleansed from the practice of sin, Tit. iii. 5, 6. Here we also learn that pious exertions are employed in the attainment of holiness—"They washed their robes." We also are called to wash ours, by the exercise of evangelical repentance, Isa. i. 16, 17; by seeking pardon through the merit and mediation of Christ, Acts xxii. 16; 1 John i. 8, 9; and by seeking spotless purity through the influence of the Holy Spirit, 2 Cor. vii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 14. But those who believe in Christ must suffer for his sake; hence observe,

2. *What Christians suffer in this state*;—Great tribulation. "They came," &c. All the followers of Christ endure tribulation, or distress arising from unpleasant occurrences, John xvi. 33;—as providential chastisement,

Heb. xii. 6;—prevalence of sin around them, Ps. cxix. 158; Ezek. ix. 4;—grievous temptations from the powers of darkness, and inherent propensities, 1 Pet. i. 6;—and cruel persecutions; in their characters, their property, their persons, their liberty, and their lives, see Heb. xi. 35—37. Christians endure great tribulation; so called, because various in its kinds, Ps. xxxiv. 19,—and heavy in its pressure, 2 Cor. v. 4. This leads us to observe,

3. *The scene of their labour and suffering*;—"from whence they came." This world—A scene benefited by them; preserved by their piety, Isa. i. 9; Matt. v. 13; and enlightened by their influence, Matt. v. 14, 16. This accounts for their stay in it, 1 Pet. ii. 9, 12.—A scene unworthy of them, Heb. xi. 48. Because the world is too wicked to esteem them, 1 John iii. 1;—and too poor to reward them, Heb. xi. 16. This accounts for their removal from it; for they came out of it. They came out of it securely, unhurt, though threatened, Isa. xliii. 2:—successively; perhaps John saw their number increase while surveying them,—and cheerfully, with glorious hope, Prov. xiv. 32. This brings us to consider the church,

II. IN ITS TRIUMPHANT STATE AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. In this state we see it,

1. *Gloriously attired, in white robes*. They are arrayed in white robes. These indicate—Spotless purity; without the least taint of sin, Eph. v. 25—27; Jude ver. 24—Complete victory over every enemy, Isa. lii. 1; Rom. viii. 37. This is also expressed by the palms in their hands, Eph. vi. 13.—These robes also indicate—Supreme felicity; or perfect happiness, without the least alloy of misery. White robes are expressive of joy, Eccl. ix. 7, 8; and their joy is unbounded in its degree, Isa. xxxv. 10. In this state we see the saints,

2. *Gloriously employed*;—they "serve God day and night in his holy temple."—They serve God: they are not insensible nor inactive. They serve him—By acts of grateful praise, for his redeeming grace, see ver. 9, 10;—By contemplation of his works; his works of creation; his works of providence; and his works of grace. These works engage their attention, are unfolded to their view, and excite their admiration, Rev. xv. 3.—And perhaps they serve God by labours of benevolence; towards their new

associates in heaven, as here; and towards their fellow-servants on earth, Rev. xxii. 9.—They serve God in his holy temple; always enjoying his presence, Rev. xxi. 3.—They serve him day and night; without interruption by infirmity, compare Matt. xxvi. 41. As they are gloriously arrayed, and gloriously employed, so they are also,

3. *Gloriously privileged; by exemptions, and enjoyments.*—By exemption from all evil. They shall be exempted from all inward distress; “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,” Isa. xxv. 8:—From all external calamities; all fiery trials, Ps. lxvi. 12;—all the scorching heat of persecution, Job iii. 17; and all the fiery darts of the wicked, Isa. xxxv. 9.—“The sun shall not light upon them, nor any heat,” Heb. iv. 9.—They are exempted from all unsatisfied desires. “They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more.” Every wish of their souls shall be crowned, Ps. cxlv. 19, and xvii. 15. Consequently, they shall be gloriously privileged also—By the enjoyment of all good;—“The Lamb shall feed them and lead them,” &c. He shall feed them with the fruit of the tree of life, Rev. ii. 7, and xxii. 2. This intimates that the felicities of heaven are various; for “The tree of life bears twelve kinds of fruits;” and always new; for “It bears fruit every month.” “And he shall lead them to living fountains.” This shows that their happiness is eternal; for those fountains flow for ever, Ps. xvi. 11, and xxxvi. 7—9.

In conclusion observe,

1. *Our text claims attention, as it urges us to duty.* This it does by showing us that the white robes here mentioned represent the saints’ righteousness, Rev. xix. 8.—That the saints’ righteousness is personal: not Christ’s purity imputed; for that never needed washing, and could not be washed by us, if it had. But their robes were washed, and washed by themselves; which cannot be affirmed of the righteousness of Christ, without blasphemy.—That this righteousness, though not that of Christ imputed, is yet derived from him; through the merit of his blood, and by the agency of his Spirit, 1 Cor. vi. 11.—And that we are required to seek it with unremitting diligence, Heb. xii. 14; Matt. v. 6.

2. *Our text also claims attention, as it encourages our hope.* It encourages us to hope—For spotless purity to fit us for

heaven. This they obtained : and this is also promised to us, Ezek. xxxvi. 25—For the immediate enjoyment of heaven at death ; this conscious happiness we see is also enjoyed by a multitude, Rev. xiv. 13—And for ample remuneration in heaven by means of glorious employments and enjoyments, in glorious society ; where all are holy, happy, and sweetly harmonious, ver. 9, 10 ; Heb. xii. 22—24.

ALPHA.

LI. THE CLAIMS OF A PERISHING WORLD UPON CHRISTIAN ZEAL AND LIBERALITY, FOUNDED IN HUMAN FRATERNITY.

GENESIS iv. 9, 10.

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

THE early history of the world is written with remarkable brevity. The sacred historian frequently dispatches in a single paragraph, and sometimes in a single sentence, events which an ordinary historian would have spread over many pages, or perhaps have amplified into a large volume. He simply states facts. He never philosophizes, nor suspends his narrative to make reflections and to deduce inferences, but steadily pursues his story, and leaves his readers to make their own reflections and to draw their own inferences. He supplies various, and ample, and rich materials for thought ; from which may be derived information the most important, and instruction the most beneficial.

The history of which our text forms a part, is one of deep interest : it exhibits one of the early, but full-grown and bitter fruits of the original transgression. Cain was the first-born of fallen Adam ; his brother Abel was the second.

They both worshipped God, but with this difference, Cain approached Him as a sinless creature; whilst Abel, feeling that he was not only a creature, but a sinner also, brought with him of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. The offering of Abel was graciously accepted, but that of Cain was rejected. This kindled his wrath and roused his indignation against Abel, and he slew him [read the text]. The example of Cain has, in all ages, been more or less copied, sometimes literally in acts of murder, and almost universally in a criminal inattention to the interests of others; especially is this true in spiritual things, and more especially in reference to the heathen world. This is a great evil, to assist in removing which I am going to shew,

I. THAT THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE ARE ONE FAMILY, AND STAND IN RELATION OF BRETHREN TO EACH OTHER. To prove this, it is necessary only to remark two things:

1. *God has made us all of one blood.* We all possess the same common nature; hence, in whatever region we meet with man, we find him susceptible of the same impressions, capable of the same enjoyments, and liable to the same evils with ourselves. His body is exactly constructed like our own, and possesses the same senses—Is sustained by the same process—Proceeds through the same stages—Is subject to the same diseases—And terminates in the same dissolution. And, like us, his soul is both intellectual and sentient. It can perceive,—and reason,—and feel,—and resolve,—and remember. In every thing we are essentially the same.

2. *We have all proceeded from the same pair.* God might have given us a common nature without giving us a common origin; but He has not done so, for we have all descended from Adam and Eve. To this infidelity has raised many objections. These are chiefly founded in difference of colour,—difference of configuration,—and remoteness of situation. That there is some difficulty in harmonizing these with the fact, that all have descended from one common ancestry, is readily conceded. But if every thing must be rejected which is attended with difficulty, we must sink into atheism and universal unbelief. Every thing in religion and philosophy must alike be renounced. The objections are more specious than solid. Colour depends partly on diet,—partly on situation,—partly on habit,—but

chiefly on climate.—Hence, persons living in the same latitudes, when the localities of these latitudes resemble each other, will generally be found of the same complexion. As to configuration, we sometimes see great variety of this in the same families. The prominent and the retiring forehead; the aquiline and the Grecian nose; the long, the round, and the oval face. The man who should gravely assert that these could not be the children of the same parents, would be considered one with whom it would be folly to hold any argument. Yet such is precisely the objections of infidels, founded in difference of form. And as to insularity and remoteness of situation, there is no difficulty here but what originates in our own ignorance. The objection, when put into the form of an argument, is simply this :—We do not know, for instance, how America was first peopled; therefore it was not peopled from Asia, the birth-place of man! Our ignorance has no weight in opposition to divine testimony.

II. THAT IT IS OUR DUTY TO CARE FOR OUR BRETHREN.

1. *The law of consanguinity requires it.* This law dictates affection and sympathy. These do not depend upon the accidents of stature, or complexion, or age, or intellect, or riches, or poverty, or residence, or any other circumstance than brotherhood. This law, indeed, binds us to furnish the greatest aid, and to manifest the tenderest affection towards that part of the family whose necessities are the greatest, and whose circumstances are the most distressing.

2. *The law of God requires it.* “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Who is my neighbour? Our Lord answers this question in the parable of the good Samaritan: from whence we learn that this depends not on vicinity of residence, nor on similarity of views or feelings, but on our common brotherhood as men. The relation is independent of nation,—or colour,—or language,—or politics,—or religion. Whilst the relation continues, the duty continues, and neither ignorance, nor superstition, nor infidelity, nor vice, can dissolve it.

3. *Our common Christianity requires it.* It enjoins love to God; but we cannot love God without loving our brother also, 1 John iv. 20.—It enjoins an imitation of the example of Christ; but Christ so loved the world as to die for it.—It enjoins obedience to Christ; but He commands

his gospel to be preached in all the world. To be without love to the universal family of man, is not to be Christians, but Cainites—to be like “Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.”

III. THAT THOSE EVILS WHICH BEFAL OUR BRETHREN THROUGH OUR INATTENTION ARE CHARGEABLE UPON US. To illustrate this let me suppose a few cases. Suppose,

1. That any of your brethren were compelled to perform a long and dangerous voyage, and that they were total strangers to navigation, and without a single chart or compass; and suppose that you abounded in charts and compasses, and in skilful navigators; and that you refused to grant them either the one or the other; and suppose these should all perish, to whom would their loss be ascribed? To you. —Or suppose,

2. That they were compelled to journey through a land of pits and precipices, abounding in beasts of prey; and that they were ignorant of the path to be pursued, and knew not where the pits and precipices were, and had nothing by which they could defend themselves from the beasts; and suppose you had it in your power to furnish them with a guide and a sufficient defence, but did not, and that they should in consequence perish; their blood would be upon your head. Or suppose,

3. That they were dying of disease, without the knowledge of any remedy; and suppose you were in possession of an infallible one, and that you withheld it; their death would be at your door. In each case the consequences would be as fatal as if you had by some positive act, as that of Cain, destroyed them.

IV. THAT WE HAVE BEEN SINFULLY INATTENTIVE TO THE ETERNAL INTERESTS OF OUR BRETHREN GENERALLY, AND TO THOSE OF THE HEATHEN PART OF THEM IN PARTICULAR. Much of our own country is yet unevangelized. Many towns and villages are within our reach, whose inhabitants for generations have been perishing for lack of knowledge, while we had opportunities to instruct them. Look at the millions of the heathen world compelled to perform the voyage of life without a Bible or missionary, &c. We are verily guilty concerning our brethren. Though we have known their situation, how little have we done! The voice of their blood crieth to the Lord.—Let us,

1. Deeply repent of our blood-guiltiness, and implore forgiveness.

2. Let us bring forth fruits meet for repentance, by exerting ourselves zealously in the cause of missions,—by fervent prayer,—by influence,—and by liberal contribution.

OMEGA.

LII. THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Exodus xxxiii. 14.

“And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”

THE preceding context clearly discovers the deep concern which Moses felt for the children of Israel. Having, according to divine appointment, conducted them from Egyptian bondage to Mount Horeb, there the Lord communed with him, and gave him special directions for his future guidance and encouragement. But being ‘tremblingly alive’ to the awful responsibility of his high and important situation, he was on various accounts greatly perplexed and discouraged. This was particularly the case, when he was commanded to proceed on the journey to Canaan; and yet the Lord threatened that he would not go with them. This deeply affected the tenderest sympathies of his heart, and rendered his prospects exceedingly gloomy and distressing. But he gave himself unto prayer, and obtained, in the text, an assurance that the Divine presence would accompany them through the trials of the wilderness, and bring them to the promised rest:—“And he said, My presence,” &c.

As these words are applicable to the people of God in every succeeding age, they will lead us to observe, The journey they pursue,—The privilege they possess,—and the happiness they enjoy.

I. THE JOURNEY THE PEOPLE OF GOD PURSUE. There is a striking analogy between the literal history of the children of Israel, and the spiritual history of the members of the Christian Church. As the former were delivered from Egyptian bondage, and travelled through the wilderness to the land of Canaan; so the latter are redeemed from spiritual thralldom,—are strangers and pilgrims on the earth,—and are travelling to the land of eternal rest.

1. *They are delivered from spiritual bondage.* Once they were willingly captivated by sin and Satan, and deeply enslaved by the fascinating snares and corruptions of the world. They were the bond-slaves of their spiritual enemies, “tied and bound with the chain of their sins,” John viii. 34. But by the mercy of God, they are happily “delivered from the power of darkness, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free,” John viii. 36; Gal. v. 1. This glorious emancipation of the soul is eminently the work of God, and is the high calling and common privilege of all his believing people, Luke i. 74, 75; Rom. vi. 22.

2. *They are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* Such were the children of Israel literally, while journeying through the toils of the wilderness; and such is morally the state of Christians as travellers to the heavenly Canaan. They are not of the world, but seek “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” Heb. xiii. 14. Like the ancient patriarchs, they desire a better country, for this is not their rest. Heaven is their home, and the world is the house of their pilgrimage. Their portion is above, and they are hastening on to glorious mansions, “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” John xiv. 1—3; 2 Cor. v. 1.

3. *They are travelling to the land of promise.* The earthly Canaan was, in many respects, a striking emblem of the heavenly rest that remains for the people of God. The former was promised to Abraham and his seed, as a goodly and permanent possession; and the latter is promised as an incorruptible and unfading inheritance to all the saints,

1 Pet. i. 3—5; 1 John ii. 25. For such characters it is prepared, and kept in reserve. They are heirs of the promises, and “have respect unto the recompense of reward.” It is the glorious object of their hope and pursuit; and being faithful unto death, they will receive the crown of life, Rom. ii. 7; Luke xii. 32. Let us then consider,

II. THE PRIVILEGE THE PEOPLE OF GOD POSSESS. “My presence shall go with thee.” Not only his general, or universal presence, which fills all space; but his special and manifested presence, to guide, protect, support, and constantly to abide with them. *

1. *His guiding presence is with his people.* He led the children of Israel forty years in the wilderness, “that he might bring them to the city of habitation,” Deut. viii. 2. He still guides his faithful servants in “the right way,” both of providence and of grace. By his word and Spirit he directs their steps, and leads them into all truth, Isa. xlii. 16. He is continually with them, to instruct them in every difficulty, — encourage them in every trial, — and prepare them for his eternal kingdom, Ps. lxxiii. 24.

2. *His protecting presence is with his people.* Like the Jews, they are travelling through “a terrible wilderness.” They are pursued by enemies, and beset with snares. But as the Lord led and protected his ancient people, “by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire;” he is still the refuge and strength of them that put their trust in him, Ps. xlv. 1; he is with them in all their troubles, and they are perfectly secure under the shadow of his wing. They “shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever,” Ps. cxxxv. 2; 1 Pet. iii. 13.

3. *His sustaining presence is with his people.* They feel their entire dependence upon him; and as their gracious benefactor and Saviour, he richly supplies all their wants, and satisfies them with his goodness, Ps. xxxiv. 10. As he anciently fed the Israelites with manna from heaven, and gave them water to drink from the smitten rock; he will ever continue to spread a table in the wilderness for his beloved people, Exod. xvi. 35, xvii. 6. He grants them the bread and the water of life, and “withholds no good thing from them,” Eph. iii. 20; Phil. iv. 19.

4. *His abiding presence is with his people.* “I will go

with thee." He will not merely send a messenger, or visit them occasionally; but will continually abide, and go with them, to the end of their journey, Ps. xlviii. 14. He will be with them in all their afflictions, temptations, and trials; and will manifest himself unto them, as he does not unto the world, John xvii. 6. Human friends may fail, and worldly comforts be withdrawn; but God is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," and will never leave nor forsake us, Ps. lxxiii. 26. And hence we may discover,

III. THE HAPPINESS THE PEOPLE OF GOD ENJOY. "And I will give thee rest." This is always the certain result of the Divine presence, and is the peculiar privilege and blessedness of the saints.

1. *His presence gives them rest in the present life.* In coming to Christ they find rest for their souls, and have joy and peace in believing. They rest from the terrors of a guilty conscience, and from the painful distractions of an impenitent and unbelieving heart. "We which have believed," says the apostle, "do enter into rest, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Isa. xxvi. 3. But though they have spiritual rest of mind, it is not perfect and uninterrupted. In the world they have tribulation, and are called to war a good warfare; but in Christ they have peace which passeth all understanding, John xvi. 33.

2. *His presence gives them rest in the hour of death.* It was this consideration that induced the Psalmist joyfully to anticipate the period of his approaching dissolution, and exclaim with holy confidence, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." He delivers his people from the fear and sting of death, and enables them to triumph over their last enemy, which shall certainly be destroyed, 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. Though the final exit of the righteous is not equally triumphant and glorious, it is always peaceful and safe, for they "die in the Lord, and rest from their labours," Ps. xxxvii. 37.

3. *His presence gives them rest in the world to come.* Their bodies shall rest in certain hope of a glorious resurrection to eternal life; and their spirits shall enter into the joy of the Lord, 2 Cor. v. 8. His immediate presence will constitute their perfect and everlasting rest, dignity, and

blessedness, Ps. xvii. 15. There they will rest from every enemy, affliction, and trouble; for "in His presence there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore," Rev. vii. 14—17.

From this subject we may learn,

1. The *character* of God's people. They are redeemed and saved by grace, and are heirs of immortal bliss, Rom. viii. 17.

2. The *encouragement of the saints*. It is their ineffable consolation to know, that "the Lord of Hosts is with them, and the God of Jacob is their refuge." Deut. xxxiii. 29.

ETA.

LIII. ISRAEL ADMONISHED.

DEUT. iv. 9.

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them to thy sons, and thy sons' sons."

It is an employment at once the most pious, prudent, and profitable, to reflect on the many blessings with which a kind Providence has seen fit to favour us while we have been passing through this state of various trial. Among those blessings a well-disposed mind will readily acknowledge the quiet enjoyment of the Sabbath. Often have the poor of Christ's flock come, jaded with worldly labours and cares, to the house of God as to an asylum; and have had their sorrows soothed by the recollection that "the Lord reigneth," by assurances of his love, and by prospects of a better country.

To such persons it must always be consolatory to think of the grace of their heavenly Father. While, at the same time, it may have a very salutary effect to remember how frequently he cautions them against their evil propensities, and the dangers to which they stand exposed. Reflections

on these subjects are naturally induced by hearing the Scriptures read. If those Scriptures are such as were in the first instance intended for the Israelites, yet, since God and religion are unchangeable, they suit us also. On this principle, we attempt some improvement of our text, which contains a solemn caution, intended to prevent a serious evil. We may invert this order, and contemplate,

I. THE EVIL ANTICIPATED; *forgetfulness of their own past experience of God's gracious dealings.* "Lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen," &c.

1. We cannot suppose, that Moses thought it possible they should so far lose all traces of these events as that they should not, by any circumstance, be brought to remembrance. For these things were some of the most impressive events of their lives; and therefore could not be lost without a total oblivion of the past. To instance only in two cases recorded in this chapter; the affair of Baal-Peor, ver. 3, 4, with Numb. xxv. 1—9; and the transactions at Sinai, ver. 10—12; to which might be added the daily supply of manna, and other memorable circumstances which could never totally escape them.

2. But these things might be so forgotten—so little and so lightly thought of, as to depart from "their hearts;" so as to have no influence there. No correcting influence; error might be connected by a heart-affecting remembrance of God's distinguishing judgments and mercies, ver. 3, 4; but such remembrance would be necessary. No chastening influence; such as that intended in ver. 5—20. Consequently, no cheering influence; such as ver. 36—40 might impart. In short, "the things which their eyes had seen" might be so forgotten as to produce no saving effect.

3. And Christians are as liable to this calamity as the Israelites were. St. Peter expresses the sentiment of Moses in a very similar style, 2 Pet. i. 5—9. Suppose the apostle, by this phrase, "purged from his old sins," to mean no more than justification, yet mark the context, and observe the steps which must have been taken, and the experience felt, in conviction, penitence, inquiry, prayer, anxiety, believing, and its happy consequences. And after all, such persons have been known to fall into sin, so as to forget and slight their past experience, or perhaps to treat it with contempt and ridicule.

4. The greatness of the evil may be inferred from the greatness of the punishment threatened: the loss of God's gracious presence, for direction, defence, &c., ver. 7; the loss of Canaan, ver. 27; and the heaviest of temporal calamities, ver. 26, and xxviii. 16, *et seq.* And should we forget and backslide, so that the things which God has done for us depart from our heart "all the days of our life," we must fall short of the heavenly Canaan, Heb. iv. 1; Rev. iii. 11; and fall into eternal misery, Matt. xxiv. 50, 51; Heb. x. 38, 39. We cannot therefore be too attentive to,

II. THE PREVENTIVES RECOMMENDED. "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul," &c. The text suggests the necessity of holy jealousy, holy vigilance, and holy exercises.

1. *Holy jealousy.* "Take heed—keep thy soul." Nothing is more dangerous than self-sufficiency and presumption; a vain confidence in what is called 'a good heart.' Moses intimates that the soul needs watching and keeping. There are some Christians whom it is not very pleasant to visit, because they are always apparently "ready to halt;" are full of doubts and fears; yet they hold on, and hold out, and thus prove the truth of that passage, "Happy is the man that feareth alway," Prov. xxviii. 14. But there are others who are full of confidence and security; they can do very well without means and ordinances; and religious communion is with them quite a needless matter. They, however, in fact, do very badly at best; and when it suits the devil's purpose, he leads them into open sin and disgrace. "The heart is deceitful above all things:" "he that trusteth to it is a fool." Peter's confidence was followed by a denial of his Master. Proper views on this subject would induce,

2. *Holy vigilance.* Only take heed—and keep thy soul diligently. This advice is necessary, because of our natural disposition to wander, and because of the allurements to which we are exposed. Grace may raise and sustain us. Yet we rise against nature; but sink, fall, wander, with it. The soul may wander on wicked things; and such is its weakness, that no man can say into what sin he may not fall. David fell into adultery and murder. Therefore "keep thy soul diligently." Resist beginnings. But we

are, perhaps, in greater danger from things which do not shock our sense of propriety, &c., but which serve, nevertheless, to distract or to divert our minds; and so to prevent a steady attention to "the one thing needful:" such as business, company, amusement, literature, &c. Therefore, "keep thy soul" within proper bounds. Watch her motions, and check them ere they become irregular or excessive. The text seems to intimate, too, that attempts will be made to steal away our souls. We are charged with the soul as a deposit which we are to keep; to preserve when it is allured by the charms of sense, and all the bewitchments of worldly pleasure. Persons destitute of religion, strangers to the Saviour's love, and the Spirit's sanctifying grace, may be pleasant and cheerful companions; but "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." And were we to suppose a change of circumstances, still, in adversity, sickness, the desertion of friends, and combination of enemies, and the temptations of our spiritual adversary, the same vigilance will be necessary to preserve us from murmuring and discontent. Keep thy soul, therefore, diligently, constantly, in,

3. *Holy exercises.* Indolence is at once disgraceful and injurious. Satan finds the idle employment. What has been already advised includes much of exercise. But in addition we may say, Diligently meditate on God's gracious dealings with you in former days; and examine what progress you make, Deut. viii. 2, 11—18. Diligently pray for a continuance and increase of his favours. "He is nigh in all things that we call upon him for," ver. 7. Think of the Redeemer's reconciling atonement, and his powerful intercession; and "ask, and receive, that your joy may be full." Then, diligently communicate what you know of God and his salvation. "But teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." Teaching is one of the most effectual methods of personal improvement. Therefore, "talk of them as thou sittest in the house, walkest by the way," &c., Deut. vi. 7—10; Ps. xcii. 1, 2. Imitate Abraham, Gen. xviii. 19, and Joshua, ch. xxiv. 15. Be Christian parents, Eph. vi. 4.

The interest of thy family requires this, Prov. xiii. 21, xxii. 6.

The interest of society requires it, Prov. xiv. 34.

Thy own interest requires it. "Take heed to thyself."
Thine must be the loss or the benefit, in time and for ever.

ZETA.

LIV. A CAUTION AGAINST DECEPTION.

DEUTERONOMY xi. 16.

"Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived."

It is one essential characteristic in Christian charity, that it "suffereth long and is kind." It not only suffers all the insults, provocations, and maliciousness of a persecuting world; but all the frailties, imperfections, and errors of the children of God. And never was there a more illustrious example of this long-suffering charity than Moses, who dictated the sentiment in the text. He had for a series of years borne with the insults of Israel. He had instructed them in their ignorance, he had reclaimed them in their wanderings, he had interceded for them in their dangers, and now, though about to be taken from them, and go up unto Mount Nebo over against Jericho to die there; yet he is most tenderly concerned for their future welfare. In this chapter, after having reminded Israel of what God had done for them, (ver. 4—7), he directs them to consider what he was about to do, ver. 10. And knowing the propensity which they had to neglect their immortal interests, and turn aside after other gods, he urges upon their attention the sentiment in the text, "Take heed to yourselves," &c. We notice here,

I. AN EVIL ANTICIPATED. That of having the heart deceived.

II. A CAUTION URGED AGAINST IT. "Take heed to yourselves," &c.

To be deceived is to be imposed upon, deluded, brought into error, so as to be led to entertain ideas and sentiments inconsistent with the truth. Men generally are liable to be

deceived. We may be deceived concerning ourselves ; we may think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and give ourselves credit for the possession of virtues to which we are total strangers ; we may be vain in our imaginations, suppose that we are wise, when in God's sight we are fools ; and think ourselves safe, when danger is at the very door. We may be deceived concerning God. Concerning his nature, we may say in our hearts that there is no God, or imagine that God is altogether such an one as ourselves. Concerning his laws, we may think that they are not as pure, as spiritual, and extensive as they really are. We may be deceived concerning religion. We may substitute mere morality, a sound creed, or a pompous profession, instead of a saving conversion to God, and a sanctification of the soul to his service. These, with a thousand other deceptive suggestions, and erroneous thoughts, may occupy our minds, and lead us astray. In proof of the possibility of deception in reference to the concerns of our souls, we observe,

1. *The scantiness and imperfection of human knowledge.* Absolute knowledge precludes the possibility of deception ; if we knew every thing, and every thing perfectly, we could not be deceived. But what little we do know, we know very imperfectly. With the objects of sense we are most intimately acquainted, but our eyes, and ears, and palate, and feelings have deceived us. Religion requires the exercise of the intellectual faculties ; and as our knowledge is so limited and defective, we may be deceived. We infer it,

2. *From the deceitfulness of the heart.* "The heart is deceitful above all things." A deceived heart turns us aside. Hence we are in love with deception, and will not come to the light that our deeds might be manifest. When Elisha told Hazael of the horrible acts of cruelty that he would commit in after-life, he so far thought it impossible that he should ever arrive at such a climax in crime, as to rip up women with child, that he said, "What ! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ?" 2 Kings viii. 12, 13. The possibility of being deceived appears,

3. *From the deceitfulness of sin.* Sin is deceitful ; it promises rewards, but pays punishment ; and it would lose its power, could we strip it of its deceit. Hence it seldom appears in its own native character, or is designated by its

own legitimate title. Revenge is called honour ; covetousness, frugality ; luxury and extravagance, good living ; lust and obscenity, innocent liberties ; and there is scarcely a crime committed, but what has some of its malignity softened down, to render it more fascinating and deceptive ; and as proofs of the deceitfulness of sin, we might revert to the pleas and subterfuges to which men resort in order to conceal it from the public eye, or lessen its evil when detected. Because sin is so deceitful, we are liable to be deceived. We infer it also,

4. *From the deceitfulness of the world.* The great mass of mankind are involved in deception. Every sinner is a deceiver, he deceives himself, and labours to deceive others. He sports himself with his own deceivings. Would men deliberately prefer darkness to light, bondage to liberty, peril to safety, and misery to happiness, if they were not most awfully deceived ? Would acts of sin, and crimes of the most heinous character, be extolled and idolized ; and acts of piety be defamed and scandalized, if delusions deep as hell had not seized their unhappy subjects ? How few men appear to be what they are in reality ! How many would shudder at the thought of appearing in their true character ! How much moral deformity is often concealed beneath a decent, and perhaps a religious exterior ! How many whited walls, and painted sepulchres, present themselves to our view ! We are also liable to be deceived,

5. *From the deceitfulness of the devil.* The devil is the most deceitful being in existence. All the deception upon earth owes its origin to his influence. He is the deceiver of the nations. He deceived Eve, the mother of us all, and he has been practising the same infernal policy, in all climes and ages. And his success has been without a parallel. Such are the reasons we have for believing that our hearts may be deceived. But the text assumes that this deception is an evil pregnant with very pernicious consequences. And this appears from the consideration, that those whose hearts are deceived are involved in a state of the most palpable error. Error of any kind is to be deplored. What tradesman would wish to make errors in his accounts ? What scholar would not guard against error in his sums ? But these errors are trivial, when compared to the grievous error in which those are involved whose hearts are de-

ceived; who are deceived concerning their souls, their salvation, and their God. Nor is this all; those whose hearts are deceived, are exposed to extreme danger. "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death." The death of the soul is a tremendous death: a double death, a second death; and to this death every sinner, whose heart is deceived, is constantly exposed; "Woe unto them that call evil good, &c.; therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble," &c. Isa. v. 20—24. See the verse subsequent to the text. Let us examine,

II. THE CAUTION URGED AGAINST THIS DECEPTION.—
 "Take heed to yourselves," &c.

1. *Be alive to a sense of your extreme danger.* No man will use caution where he suspects no danger. Our senses furnish us with intimations of the dangers to which the body is exposed; but, alas! to the dangers of the soul, though infinitely more alarming, we are too frequently insensible. Who that surveys the mirth, and jollity, and merriment of the multitude, would at all suspect that they were in any danger, or exposed to any peril? But who that reads the Bible with attention can fail to be convinced, that we are threatened with the most tremendous punishment? Now in order that we may take heed to ourselves, let us be broad awake to our danger. Let us consider what we are,—how deeply fallen! Let us weigh well our circumstances, dangers, and enemies; this will lay the foundation for caution and circumspection.

2. *Seek for the illuminating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.* The mind of man is so completely darkened by the deceitfulness of sin, that he has naturally no perceptions of his danger; but the Holy Ghost opens the eyes of our understanding, and we see the truth, and begin to know ourselves. But illumination alone is not sufficient; our powers must be renewed, we must become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Your danger may be perceived, but without the renewal of your hearts in righteousness, you will possess no mental energy to avoid it. The Holy Ghost will illuminate and sanctify you. O seek his influence by fervent, importunate prayer. "Take heed to yourselves,"

3. *By the constant practice of self-examination.* Examine

yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Whether you have the fruits of faith. Whether you are the followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. Examine yourselves faithfully: self-love leads us to look partially on ourselves;—frequently: never suffer a day to pass over your heads without an investigation of your conduct. It was the advice of an old heathen,

“Let not the stealing god of sleep surprise,
Nor creep in slumber o’er thy weary eyes,
Ere every action of the former day
Strictly thou dost and righteously survey.”

“Take heed to yourselves,”

4. *By watching over yourselves.* “Watch and pray.” “Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” “Watch thou in all things.” These are scriptural directions, and were addressed to the primitive saints. Watchfulness will lead you to keep a strict guard over your thoughts. Your thoughts will wander on forbidden objects, but by watchfulness you will detect them: vain, foolish, and lascivious thoughts will seek to obtrude on your attention. Take heed to yourselves in reference to your words and actions.

Conclude, by urging the text on the attention of hearers of all descriptions.

People of all ages, young and old—Of all circumstances, rich and poor—Of all relations, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants—Of all callings, preachers and people—“Take heed to yourselves.”

BETA.

LV. THE CHARACTER AND DEATH OF MOSES.

JOSHUA i. 2.

“Moses my servant is dead.”

HUMAN character is a subject, in the contemplation of which our minds may be profitably exercised. On the one

hand, those traits which with common propriety belong to all men, confer on it a peculiarity of interest; while, on the other, individual distinctions preserve it from sameness and insipidity. But the comparative small sphere which we severally occupy in society prevents us from that enlarged indulgence in this study which appears desirable; and hence we are necessitated to refer to biographical records. But merely human productions of this kind are frequently erroneous. Biographers are sometimes ignorant of the characters they profess to delineate, while in other instances, they write under the influence of interest, passion, or prejudice; and, consequently, the credence we yield to their works is not absolute and entire. But the biography of the Bible is pure truth: it demands our implicit credence, and challenges our closest investigation. No fictitious colouring is there used to heighten character,—no false shading to depress it. Its writers were men fitted for their labour, not only by an intimate acquaintance with their subjects, and by that elevation of mind which religion communicates, but also by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and coming from a God who is emphatically called, “Holy and true.” Scripture biography possesses holiness and truth indelibly stamped upon it. To proceed more immediately to our text,—we have, in this passage,

I. THE CHARACTER OF MOSES,—“my servant.” Moses was a servant of God, Exod. xiv. 31; Num. xii. 7, 8; Deut. xxxiv. 5; Josh. ix. 24; 2 Kings xxi. 8; Neh. x. 29; Ps. cv. 26; 1 Chron. vi. 49, 2 Chron. xxiv. 9; Dan. ix. 11; Mal. iv. 4; Rev. xv. 3.

1. *By the consecration of his powers.* In consecration is necessarily implied the abandonment of some objects, as well as setting apart to others, Matt. vi. 24; Luke xvi. 13. The alternative in Moses’ case was wealth, honour, luxury, science, friendship, gratitude in the court of Egypt, and peaceful retirement in the land of Midian; or, degradation, toil, reproach, sorrow, and anxiety with the people of God. But he contemned the lures of the world, and, sacrificing prospects of worldly greatness, gave himself up to the service of heaven, Heb. xi. 24—27.

2. *By the homage of his mind;*—hence his choice of God’s service was made in the prime of life, when all his mental faculties were arrived at maturity, Acts vii. 23; he

was a man of prayer, and not leaning to his own understanding; we find him acknowledging God in all his ways, Exod. xvii. 4; Levit. xxiv. 10—12; Num. xv. 32—34; he was remarkable for his meekness, Num. xii. 3; he was deeply humble, Exod. iii. 11; he was admitted to extraordinary intercourse with God, Exod. xix. 3, 9, 20; xx. 21; xxiv. 13—18; xxxiii. 11; xxxiv. 28; Deut. xxxiv. 10: hence arose his desire to see the glory of God, Exod. xxxiii. 18; and God's condescension in yielding to it, Exod. xxxiv. 5—7. Much of the conduct of Moses was induced by motives which human understanding would never have suggested; but he laid aside his own will in submission to the will of God, and has left on record one of the most illustrious instances of the great and expanded mind being without principle, save that which religion dictated, and which in its operation tended to promote the glory of God, and the advantage of his people.

3. *By the obedience of his life*,—and obedience, though necessarily posterior to the principles which cause it, constitutes the essence of a servant. The word servant, in Scripture, is sometimes synonymous with slave, Eph. vi. 5, 6; Col. iii. 22; 1 Tim. vi. 1; Tit. ii. 9; 1 Pet. ii. 18; but the word *θεραπων*, which the Septuagint uses in this passage, and the apostle in Heb. iii. 5, seems rather to imply the voluntary obedience of a steward, than the compelled obedience of a slave. The apostle gives this appellation to Moses, intimating his character of a faithful and diligent observer of the mind of the Almighty. For this word does not signify any servant, such as one employed in mere domestic affairs, but one whose business it is to collect and take care of property: and the word from which it is derived may signify to reverence with obedience, and to devote oneself wholly to another. (*Beza et Hyperius in locum, et Leigh in verbum.*) Moses was obedient and faithful,—in the promulgation of the divine decrees, Deut. i. 3;—in the due application of sacred property, Exod. xl. 16;—in preparing by prophecy for the coming of his divine Master, the Son of God, Deut. xix. 15—19: and the Pentateuch, containing a record of events which transpired in the first 2553 years of the existence of our world, remains to this day a monument of his obedience, for our instruction and improvement.

4. *By the philanthropy of his actions.* No man can be a servant of God, unless he love his fellow-creatures, Levit. xix. 18; Matt. xxii. 37—39; Mark xii. 30, 31; Rom. xiii. 9, 10; James ii. 8; 1 John ii. 11; iii. 14, 17; iv. 11. The affection of Moses towards the people of Israel was manifested in a most extraordinary and disinterested manner. For their sake, he repeatedly exposed himself to the wrath of Pharaoh, Exod. ii. 11, 12, 15; x. 28. For them he left the pleasures of a pastoral life, Exod. iv. 20. For their advantage he endured all the fatigues of judicial investigation and decision, Exod. xviii. 13, 16, 18. In the time of their rebellion against God, Moses was their intercessor. Often were the thunderbolts of heaven directed against them, and sometimes they even fell among them; but destruction was stayed by the prayers of Moses, Exod. xxxiv. 9; xxxii. 9—14. On their account he lost important blessings, Deut. i. 37; iii. 23—26; and rather than that their sins should be unforgiven, he prayed that his name might be erased from the register of heaven, Exod. xxxii. 32. Nor was the treatment which Moses endured from his people calculated to excite affection or conciliate regard. Often did they murmur against him; often did they regret being led by him in the way of Divine direction; and sometimes they even went so far as to propose putting him to death. But notwithstanding their base ingratitude, his love for them did not cease till he ceased to live; his last words were blessings upon Israel; his last sight was the land, long promised, and now about to be bestowed on them, Deut. xxxiv. 1—3. Our text leads us to contemplate,

II. THE DEATH OF MOSES. This was,

1. *A penal event.* Death, in a certain sense, may always be so denominated, as it owes its introduction into the world to a violation of the law of God; but that the life of Moses was not extended to a longer term was the result of a personal offence, recorded Num. xx. 7—11. How inconsistent a creature is man! How often do we find that the failings of good men are in those very virtues for the exercise of which they have been remarkable. Abraham, the father of the faithful, sins through unbelief, Gen. xii. 11—13; xx. 2. Job, the most illustrious for patience, struggles under the scourge of God, and curses the day of his birth, Job iii. 1—12; and Moses, the meekest of all

men, forgets the sanctity of the Divine character, and speaks under the influence of passion. After having contemplated the virtues of so great and good a man, it is an ungracious labour to turn the medal, and dwell upon his faults. A cursory glance at Moses' crime will therefore suffice us. The consequence of it was, that God declared he should not bring Israel into the land of promise, Num. xx. 12. Israel is now about to enter this land. Jordan is in sight, and Moses dies according to the word of the Lord.

2. *A sudden event.* Moses was worn down by no disease. His eye was not dim by the revolution of one hundred and twenty years, nor was his natural force abated by the vicissitudes to which he had been subject, Deut. xxxiv. 7. The same vigour nerved his system when he went up to the mount to die, as when formerly he went up to converse with God. The same fire shone in his eye, as he took a last look at the tents of the Israelites from the eminence of Nebo, as when he looked on their idolatry from the mount of God. What was the physical cause of his death we do not know, nor is it necessary for us to enquire. The words, (translated in our version, "according to the word of the Lord," Deut. xxxiv. 5,) literally mean, "upon the mouth of the Lord;" hence, say the Rabbins, 'God extracted his soul with a kiss,'—and hence a sacred poet of modern times,

" Like Moses to thyself convey,
And kiss my raptured soul away."

3. *A solitary event.* When Aaron died, the hands of his brother and his son closed his eyes, but Moses is to die alone. He takes leave of the people and of Joshua,—begins to ascend the mountain,—the eyes of all Israel are upon him,—the distance increases,—vision fails,—Moses can no longer be seen. He now surveys the long-promised, the long-sought, and long-expected land from Jericho northward, and from the hills of Hermon to the Mediterranean sea; and now, in gratitude and joy, he may adopt the language subsequently used by Simeon, Luke ii. 29, 30. God alone is present, and Moses yields his soul into the hands of his Maker.

4. *Subsequently attended by extraordinary circumstances.* At the funeral of Moses there was no pomp of procession,

no long train of following mourners. The body was buried in a valley of Moab, either immediately by God himself, or immediately by the agency of angels. There was then no sumptuous mausoleum erected over his remains; for, lest the Israelites (whose propensity to idolatry was notorious) should make the body of Moses an object of religious veneration, God wisely concealed his sepulchre from the knowledge of all men; and the contention between Michael the archangel and the devil (Jude 9) is supposed to have originated in a wish of the latter to frustrate this design of God. The appearance of Moses with Elias on the mount of transfiguration, has induced some to believe that Moses was translated, as well as his illustrious companion on that occasion. The Scripture, however, plainly declares that Moses "died;" and to discredit the express declaration of Holy Writ, merely to account for that which otherwise appears an unaccountable phenomenon, savours more of "fleshly wisdom," than of that faith to which "all things are possible."

REMARKS.

1. *Moses was an eminent type of Christ.* Jesus in his human nature, fulfilling the will of the Father, is called the servant of God also, Isa. xlii. 1; liii. 11. Was Moses consecrated to his work? Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed, John iv. 5, 26; Luke iv. 18, 21; Heb. vii. 28. Did Moses yield to God the homage of his mind? So did Christ to the Father, Matt. xxvi. 39, 42; Luke xxii. 42. Was Moses a servant of God by obedience? Christ was so more abundantly, John iv. 34; Heb. v. 8. Was Moses remarkable for philanthropy? Christ was much more so, Acts x. 38; Luke xix. 41, 42. Moses was far inferior to Christ in his personal character, Isa. xlii. 2, liii. 7, 9; John viii. 46; Heb. vii. 26. In his official character, Heb. iii. 3, 6. In the dispensation introduced by him, John ii. 17; Heb. vii. 19—24, x. 1—12, 28, 29. In his intercession, Isa. liii. 12; Luke xxiii. 34; Heb. vii. 25. Moses is dead, but Christ is alive, God over all, blessed for ever.

2. *The servants of God may claim no exemption from the common lot of mankind.* Moses died, and we must die, 2 Sam. xiv. 14. Moses died suddenly, and we may die in a

similar manner. How necessary then is it to watch unto prayer, and to live in readiness for the last change, when this tenement of mortality shall fall to ruin, and the gates of eternity shall open to the soul! Amos iv. 12; Matt. xxiv. 42, 44; 1 Thess. v. 6.

3. *The characters of the great and good should excite our imitation*, (1 Cor. iv. 16, xi. 1; Phil. iii. 17; Heb. vi. 12; James v. 10,) of their faith,—of their devotion,—of their benevolence,—of their good works; and the result will be, that we shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, to share their glory for ever. Even so, Lord Jesus.

MU.

LVI. THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST APPEARED TO JOSHUA.

JOSHUA v. 14.

“And he said, Nay; but as Captain of the Host of the Lord am I now come.”

DIVINE appearances were frequent in the early ages of the world. God appeared to Adam in the garden of Eden, Gen. iii. 8. Afterwards he appeared to Cain and Abel, and, probably, to Enoch and Noah, Gen. iv. 16, v. 24, vi. 13. He appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and to Moses, Gen. xvii. 1, xxvi. 2, xxviii. 12. And Joshua saw him on the plains of Jericho as a man with his sword drawn in his hand.—In this discourse we shall consider the circumstances of Israel when Joshua saw the Captain of the Lord's host;—the particular circumstances of that divine appearance;—and the use which should be made of this important subject.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ISRAEL WHEN JOSHUA SAW THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST.

1. *They were just come up out of the wilderness*, where they had wandered forty years, and where they had seen the signs and wonders of the Lord, and the special manifestations of his love. Jordan had been divided, and the people came up out of that river on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho, chap iv. 19.

2. *The rite of circumcision*, which was originally instituted in the days of Abraham, but which had been neglected in the wilderness, was restored, ver. 7. The people had just kept the passover in the plains of Jericho, ver. 10. And the manna, with which they had been fed in the wilderness, had ceased, ver. 12.

3. *They were about to enter on a great and terrible war with the nations of Canaan*, under the command of Joshua, a man of distinguished piety, courage, and zeal for the LORD OF HOSTS. When God gave him the command of his hosts, he said, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life;" and the people said, "All that thou commandest us we will do," chap. i. 5, 16.

4. But notwithstanding the assurance of success which had been given to Joshua, it might be necessary for the people to know, by some special appearance, that the Lord of Hosts was with them, and that the God of Jacob would be their refuge; for the nations whom they had to drive out were numerous, strong, resolute, and well skilled in arms, Jos. x. 14; Ps. xlv. 7.

5. *The people having entered into the path of duty*, by circumcision and a pious observance of the passover, were prepared for the war; and relying on the support and assistance of Jehovah, and having entire confidence in Joshua as their general, were ready to go up and possess the land. Then their Great Captain graciously appeared, to strengthen and encourage them in the undertaking.

6. Joshua went out, as a wise and prudent general, to survey Jericho, the city on which their first attack was to be made; and while he was making his observations on that strong-hold, without an attendant, and, probably, in the silent watches of the night, the Captain of the Lord's host appeared.

II. THE PARTICULARS OF THIS DIVINE APPEARANCE.

1. *Joshua saw a man with a sword drawn in his hand.* The sight was unexpected, awful, and alarming. Many men would have been terrified; but Joshua was a man of valour. Those who fill high offices in the camp of Jehovah should be stout and valiant; for the people look up to them in the hour of danger; and if they are afraid, fear and terror, like a mighty flood, overwhelm the host.

2. The moment Joshua saw the man of war, he went up boldly, and demanded of him whether he were a friend or a foe to Israel. It is necessary to know who are our friends, and who are our foes, that we may know how to deal with them; but if we mistake a friend for a foe, or a foe for a friend, we fall into a dangerous snare; and as this is no uncommon case in the present state of things, let us be ever on our guard.

3. When interrogated by Joshua, the Divine person who appeared in a human form, declared that he was come as the Captain of the Lord's host. Israel was the host of the Lord; this person was their Captain; he was above Joshua, and was come to support his people, and to fight against their enemies.

4. But who was this wondrous person? Commentators are not agreed in their views of his character. Some suppose he was a created angel, but the truth seems to be that he was the Eternal Word. The following arguments, in favour of this opinion, are of considerable weight: first, the language which is used by the Captain of the Lord's host is similar to that which was used by the Lord, when he appeared to Moses in the bush, *Exod. iii. 5*. Secondly, he allowed Joshua to worship him, which would have been gross idolatry had he been a created angel. Thirdly, the homage which he required of Joshua, by taking off his shoes, is expressive of that solemn and profound worship which is due to God alone. And, fourthly, he is expressly called the Lord, in the following chapter, *ver. 2*.

5. *Joshua knew that it was the Lord*, and, falling prostrate, worshipped at his feet. Here we see one of the greatest generals of antiquity paying divine homage to that glorious person who, in the fulness of time, "was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." *1 John iii. 8*.

6. The Captain of the host commanded Joshua to un-

cover his feet, because the ground was made holy by his special presence. And shall we refuse to worship our blessed Immanuel? He was worshipped before his incarnation, when he appeared to patriarchs and prophets; he was worshipped in the days of his flesh; and he is now worshipped in the heavenly world.

III. THE USE WHICH WE SHOULD MAKE OF THIS IMPORTANT SUBJECT.

1. This appearance affords sufficient proof that the war which the Israelites carried on with the nations of Canaan was just and necessary. The Canaanites were exceedingly wicked; they were foul idolaters, but had been spared till the measure of their iniquity was full, Gen. xv. 16. Then, when they were ripe for destruction, the Lord made his people the instruments of his wrath and justice.

2. It is evident, from this appearance, that Jesus was at the head of the Jewish church. Joshua, as his name imports, was a Saviour; but he was only an instrument in the hands of the Almighty Saviour, who had delivered his people from their enemies, and who was about to lead them into the land of promise.

3. *The Church of God is now engaged in a spiritual warfare* against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, is leading us on to victory and to glory, Heb. ii. 10. He said to his disciples, before he ascended into heaven, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii. 20.

4. In all cases, *it is our duty to seek the counsel of our Captain*, as Joshua did on this memorable occasion. He addressed the Captain of the Lord's host in these words,— "What saith my Lord to his servant?" Thus, when Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus on his way to Damascus, he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts ix. 6.

5. *Every knee should bow to Jesus*. His worship is solemn and sweet. Joshua enjoyed more pleasure when engaged in the worship of his Lord, than the world could give. "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker," Ps. xcv. 6. Thus engaged, what have we to fear? He whom we adore, will guard us in danger; and all who threaten our destruction will be found liars unto us, Deut. xxxiii. 29.

6. When our warfare is accomplished, we shall enter

into the heavenly Canaan, where we shall enjoy eternal peace and complete happiness : for in that better country no enemy will be suffered to approach us ; and then it may be said of all our foes, as it was said of the Egyptians, when Pharaoh and his hosts were destroyed, " Ye shall see them no more for ever," *Exod. xiv. 13.* Let us, then, take courage. Our Captain is a conquering Hero, *Isa. lxiii. 1, 6.* May we prove his power to save, both in life and in death ! Amen.

SIGMA.

LVII. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

JOSHUA x. 42.

" And all these kings^{*} and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel."

To every person, living under a government by whose laws he is bound, it is of consequence to know what those laws are ; and the more so in proportion to the greatness of the reward of obedience on the one hand, or the penalty of transgression on the other.

And if the supreme magistrate have a right, not only to enforce, but to modify, suspend, or abrogate those laws at pleasure, it must be also highly desirable to know the character and disposition of the sovereign by whose authority we are governed, and in whose hands is our destiny.

God is our sovereign ruler. We should therefore " seek out of the book of the LORD and read" his laws. And from his past dealings with mankind, we may learn so much of his character as shall enable us to know how to walk before him with approbation, and in peace and safety.

As both the Old and New Testaments are a revelation from God, there must be a general correspondence between

them, although there may be some circumstantial difference; the latter explaining more clearly some things which the former had not distinctly revealed, and offering such modification of general principles as Divine wisdom saw meet. In both God is revealed as a sovereign: and though in the New Testament his sovereignty appears more tempered with clemency, yet still he is "the King eternal, immortal," &c.

Now since we are confessedly under his government, it cannot be wrong or useless for us to meditate on this subject. In which it is obvious, that, as a sovereign,

I. GOD HAS AN INDISPUTABLE RIGHT TO DISPENSE HIS FAVOURS TO WHAT PERSONS AND IN WHAT PROPORTIONS HE PLEASES. Observe, he is the sole proprietor of the universe. Every part of it is his, by right both of creation and of conservation. As the sole proprietor, therefore, it is his to dispose of,

1. *Worldly goods.* One is accordingly born to affluence, while another is cradled in poverty, and through life can barely earn a subsistence by the sweat of his brow. Before they existed, they could, of course, have no claims or demerits: and therefore the difference in their lot must be owing to his sovereign disposal of events. Thus in respect of,

2. *Bodily constitution and health.* As variety marks all other of God's works, so here it happens, that one is naturally robust, another sickly, a third deformed, &c. Who is it that maketh the strong, the beautiful, &c. to differ? The answer may be found in 2 Sam. xxii. 30, 35.

3. *Mental qualifications.* "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." Much, it is true, depends on personal application. But much depends on natural capacity; given "to one five talents, to another two, and to another one:" and much on the opportunities, instructors, &c. which God either gives or withholds. One is born almost an idiot,—of savage parents,—in a wilderness: another, of almost superhuman capabilities, enters on life in a land of science, and has parents able and willing to afford him every means of gratifying his thirst for knowledge. On all these accounts, perhaps, David might use the language of Ps. xvi. 5—7.

4. *Spiritual privileges.* Mankind soon began to have

greater or smaller advantages in this respect, as they descended from families more or less holy : and the case is the same to the present day. Instance the Israelites and heathens, formerly ; Christians and pagans, now.

II. GOD HAS AN EQUAL RIGHT TO RESUME OR TO TRANSFER HIS FAVOURS.

1. We have seen that whatever we possess is of free favour at first, from the original Proprietor of all. Such the acknowledgment of the Psalmist, "Of thine own have I given thee."

2. No person becomes a proprietor of his possessions merely because he has long enjoyed them. If the possessor of a worldly estate may, in a secondary sense, become the proprietor, because no person can prove a better title, it is not so here. Every blessing is a loan resumable at pleasure ; and instead of gaining a right by holding it, the holder is becoming more and more indebted. The property is still God's, Ps. xxiv. 1, and l. 10, 12.

3. On this ground he took his own land of promise from the Canaanites, and transferred it to Israel. And he still puts down one and raises up another as it pleases him. Had our Lord, in every case in which he bestowed sight on a blind, or hearing on a deaf man, &c., taken sight or hearing from another, he would have done that individual no wrong. For on the ground just mentioned, he may justly resume the health, mental qualifications, &c., he has lent. If a Swift, a Steele, a Macknight, &c., be bereft of his distinguishing genius, the Sovereign has done only what he had a right to do. Nay, even as to life itself, the highest creature holds it from moment to moment by the free grace of God.

III. GOD MAY JUSTLY PUNISH EVERY VOLUNTARY TRANSGRESSION OF HIS RIGHTEOUS AND EQUITABLE LAWS. Here we remark,

1. That his intelligent and moral creatures are what they are, is owing to his sovereign pleasure. Thus Elihu, Job xxxv. 10, 11.

2. Since they are such, and capable of moral government, their natures require a law, as a test of their obedience, and for the exercise of their capabilities : and it is his prerogative, who is not only the sovereign Lord, but infinitely wise, to say what is right, to enact such law.

3. In order to make the law efficient, it was necessary it should be guarded and enforced by penal sanctions. Whence it follows,

4. That truth requires, while sovereignty authorises, the just punishment of disobedience to his righteous and equitable commands. It may be well to remark, that nothing has been advanced which supposes the Divine Being acting contrary to righteousness and equity; nothing that supposes him creating intelligences purposely for eternal misery. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But cruelty, whether in children or in tyrants, we condemn as wrong.

IV. IN EXECUTING HIS RIGHTEOUS PURPOSES, GOD MAY EMPLOY WHAT AGENCY OR INSTRUMENTALITY HE PLEASES. He doubtless can and may work immediately, on any and every part of his creation. Yet he seldom does so. Oftentimes he employs angels, as in the case of Sennacherib or Herod. And oftentimes, storm, pestilence, earthquake, &c. Deists do not object to these. Yet they cavil at God's employing the sword of Israel; a difference merely in the circumstance of instrumentality. Earthquakes, storms, &c. destroy children as well as grown persons: and no more is done in the case to which our text refers. In verse 11, we are told, that "the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them, and they died:" so that "they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." And surely there is no more injustice in his resuming the life he had given, by a sword, than by a hailstone or thunder-bolt. Let the subject therefore teach us,

1. *Reverence*. "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord," &c. Jer. x. 6, 7. The opposite disposition is reprov'd, Rom. ix. 20; and threatened, Isa. xlv. 9, 10.

2. *Dependence*. We enjoy no more or longer than he blesses us; and live no longer than he sustains, Psalm xc. 3, 14, and civ. 27—29.

3. *Humility*. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," &c. Jer. ix. 23, 24; 1 Cor. iv. 7.

4. *Gratitude*. Who maketh thee to differ? as to natural, civil, and, especially, religious blessings: a Saviour, gospel, faithful ministry, &c. Whence,

5. *Confidence*, joined with *obedience*. His sovereignty is no arbitrary caprice. He had a moral as well as a natural right to deal as he did with the Canaanites, see Gen. xv. 16. And he will render unto every man according to his deeds, Rom. ii. 6—11.

ZETA.

LVIII. DISOBEDIENCE VISITED.

1 KINGS xiii. 26.

“And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him and slain him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake unto him.”

MAN is formed for society: and his happiness is best promoted by the cultivation and exercise of social affections. Indeed, so much does our comfort depend on these, that we almost instinctively become social to a greater extent than perhaps we are at first aware of; so that we not only feel an interest in what concerns our friends and contemporaries, but are often greatly affected by the history of persons and events of former ages.

The interest we in this case experience may not, it is true, always arise from the cause just mentioned. We are prompted by curiosity to read and speculate concerning angels, both those who kept, and those “who kept not their first estate;” although we have few things in common with them, and they were never our associates. But when we turn our attention to the affairs of past generations of men, in addition to curiosity, we are influenced by fellow-feeling, by sympathy with those who were partakers of the sufferings and sorrows, the privileges and pleasures of our

common nature. And in our review of the past, we usually feel considerable interest in those who have exerted an extensive influence on the community of which they were members. Were they benefactors to mankind? then we revere their memory. Were they pests of society? then we mark their conduct with indignation, and feel a kind of satisfaction when righteous heaven visits them with their just desert.

But among the various characters that may pass under survey and interest our feelings, there is scarcely one that produces greater effect on a well-constituted mind, than the man who has long and eminently served God and his generation, but who, at last, falls into sin and disgrace; who, with fortitude and circumspection, has prosecuted life's tempestuous voyage, and kept clear of dangers on either hand, till quite within sight of port; and now, when all seems to be gained, inadvertently allows his bark to run on some hidden rock, and makes shipwreck of his own happiness and of the hopes of all his friends. Did we not, in our youthful days, when reading the historical parts of the Bible, seriously regret the apostacy, for instance, of some of the Jewish kings, and the errors of others of them, whose early piety had charmed our hearts? And have we not, since then, sighed over some of our own acquaintance, "How is the mighty fallen," &c.? And when we read the story of the unfortunate person to whom our text refers, we may well take up the language of lamentation which was uttered over his untimely grave, and say, "Alas! my brother." To improve this subject, we will consider the general character, the temptation, the fall, and the punishment, of this interesting man.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER — "The man of God." From this chapter and various other places, it is evident that this title serves to designate a prophet. And the designation itself may serve to denote, in those to whom it refers,

1. *Their special employment.* They are engaged on some peculiar business, not their own, but God's; are sent with his special messages, see ver. 1, 2; Judges xiii. 3, 6, 9, and 1 Sam. ii. 27.

2. *Their special qualifications.* As God engaged them in his work, so he furnished them for it. On those important occasions, they were under his special influence and inspir-

ation. Without such qualification they could not look through the future, so as to describe events depending on the will of man, and on a thousand contingencies which God only could foresee. The prophecy to which we have referred (ver. 2) was delivered 350 years before its accomplishment; and was, nevertheless, fulfilled; although all the idolaters of Israel were concerned to prevent it, see 2 Kings xxiii. 15—18. A striking proof that “the prophecy came not by the will of man,” &c., 2 Pet. i. 21. To these we may add,

3. *Their eminent devotedness.* In this acceptance the title applies to all who were privileged to wear it. Instance Moses, the first to whom we find it given, Deut. xxxiii. 1; and “who was faithful,” &c. Heb. iii. 5; as also Samuel and David, 1 Sam. ix. 6; Neh. xii. 24. See, moreover, Paul’s addresses to Timothy, 1 Tim. vi. 8—12, and 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

That every part of this description applies to “the man of God who came out of Judah by the word of the Lord,” we may safely infer from the short account of him which this chapter furnishes.

Observe his fidelity and zeal. Solomon had grieved the Lord by his idolatry, and the people by his extravagance, ch. xii. 4, 15. And when Rehoboam refused redress, ten of the tribes made Jeroboam king over them, ver. 16—20. Jeroboam, in order to wean them from Jerusalem, instituted the worship of the golden calves; and to render himself popular, he appointed a feast, conducted the worship, &c., ver. 25—33. And now, when the king was surrounded by his satellites, and in all the plenitude of his power, the prophet publicly and boldly denounced the judgments of Jehovah against the altar and the whole institution. Yet,

Observe his meekness and placability. It sometimes happens, that with a degree of zeal for God there is considerable mixture of angry personal feeling. In such case, by one party at least, an unholy passion may be applauded as religious devotion. But here we find the good man, who in the way of duty feared not “the wrath of the king,” most readily forgiving, and praying for, the incensed and insulting monarch, ver. 4—6. He had learnt to hate the sin, but to love the sinner.

Observe, too, his fortitude and disinterestedness, ver. 7—9.

Presents were, and still are, in the east, regarded as tokens of respect. Jeroboam wished to give, also, a token of obligation, in a princely reward. But the man of God steadily refuses both the honour and the profit, and shews himself superior to every worldly consideration. What pity that this character should not have been sustained throughout! But "let not him that girdeth on the harness, boast," &c. Even this man was tempted, and fell. Let us consider,

II. HIS TEMPTATION, ver. 11—18. This temptation was,

1. *In suitable time and circumstances.* As he sat under the oak, fatigued and hungry, the offer of refreshment and rest was captivating. The enemy will always assault where he finds us most vulnerable. Was Eve hungry? Gen. iii. 6. Jesus was, Matt. iv. 2—4. But there is no virtue in not yielding where no effect is produced, and no resistance required. This was,

2. *By a suitable agent;—an old prophet.* Venerable through age,—a prophet in garb and appearance,—and professing a direct and special revelation, ver. 18. When Jeroboam made a similar proposal, the cloven foot appeared: now it was concealed. It is not an easy matter to estimate this old prophet's character, or to conjecture his motives in this affair. Probably, (1.) he had, like Balaam, been employed as a prophet of Jehovah; this is rendered almost certain, according to our version of ver. 20. But (2.) he had lost his piety: religion was become with him a matter of speculation and curiosity rather than of experience. Hence, his voluntary residence at the seat of idolatry,—his permitting his sons to be at the festivities,—and his mischievous lying. It is possible, indeed, that "an angel spake unto him." But if so, it must have been a fiend of darkness in disguise. And whether the old prophet was deceived or not, it may be said that to the man of God, the temptation was as from "Satan transformed into an angel of light." Christians, beware of such tempters. If persons who have nothing of religion left but the garb and profession, invite you to a laxity of living, remissness in duty, &c.; if they set you the example, and tell you that 'their consciences do not condemn them,' and say, 'I am a professor, a teacher, &c., as thou art,' heed them not. "To the law and to the testimony," &c. The case here supposed

is not a new one, 1 Pet. ii. 15—22. But we return to the man of God; and remark how temptation led to,

III. HIS FALL. Here we must blame,

1. *His unwatchfulness.* When at Bethel he was on his guard. But, retired from the scene of difficulty and danger, he relaxed. Peace and prosperity are often more dangerous than open hostility. "Watch therefore, and pray always."

2. *His easy credulity and compliance.* A suspicious temper may be neither very comfortable nor creditable to its possessor. Yet our acquaintance with the world serves to shew us the need of caution: and the Scripture advises us "to try every spirit." The old prophet, we allow, professed that "an angel spake," &c. But the place of his residence, and his advising directly contrary to what the man of God knew to be a divine revelation, were suspicious circumstances. Had the tempted said, "Let God be true, and every man a liar," he might have avoided,

3. *His positive transgression:* "who was disobedient," &c. The command was simple, but peremptory, ver. 17. It was not his part, it is not ours to ask, 'What harm can there be in this?' but to obey. He disobeyed. And see,

IV. HIS PUNISHMENT,—including,

1. *The denunciation of God's displeasure,* ver. 20—22. Note the time. "As they sat at table;" in the very act of transgression. So speedy and so remarkable the punishment, Num. xi. 33; Dan. iv. 28—33. Note the manner. Dr. Kennicott and others, indeed, suppose that the revelation was made, not to the old prophet, but to the man of God; and translate accordingly, see Dr. A. Clarke *in loc.* They seem to think the old prophet unworthy of the honour. But surely it was rather a judgment than an honour to be constrained thus to declare his own iniquity, &c.

But, however the disclosure was made to the offender, there was mercy in it; as he had timely warning to prepare for,

2. *The full effect of God's displeasure,* ver. 24, 25. (1.) The finger of God is evident in this transaction, ver. 28. (2.) There is no intimation that the visitation extended farther than to bodily death and the loss of family sepulture. (3.) This awful event was intended to be monitory to the Bethelites, to Jeroboam, and the old prophet. Perhaps to

the last it was salutary, see ver. 29—31. And the story may admonish us of,

1. *The evil of sin.* In this case not punished beyond what is its desert in every case. Its turpitude most apparent in the sufferings of good men, and of the Saviour. Wherefore, 1 Pet. iv. 14—19.

2. *The constraining dignity of goodness.* It exacted the homage of the old prophet, ver. 31, and of Jeroboam, ver. 6, 7.

3. *The necessity of constant watchfulness and prayer,* 1 Cor. x. 12; Ps. cxix. 117.

ZETA.

LIX. GOD'S METHOD OF HEALING OFFENSIVE TO THE PRIDE OF MAN.

2 KINGS v. 12.

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?”

“ALL Scripture,” saith St. Paul, “is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable—for instruction in righteousness.” All Scripture, not particular parts of books only, but all and every part of it. Hence those who confine themselves to particular passages, and do not read the whole, deprive themselves of much important instruction. Not only may we derive profit from those facts which are immediately connected with the redemption of the soul,—or from the prominent doctrines of the gospel,—or from the precepts or promises of Christianity, but also from those parts which do not appear to have any connection with the gospel, or any particular bearing towards Christ. An attentive examination of many of these will shew us how much we

need Christ, and will lead us to prize his gospel. As there is no village in the kingdom from which a way may not be found to the metropolis, so there is no passage in the Bible which may not be connected with Christ.

Many of the historical parts of Scripture, though they say nothing of Christ, abound in instruction. They exhibit many a beacon to admonish us of danger, and many a light to direct our course. In them we see men placed in a variety of situations, and under various aspects of providence, by which human character is developed, and the secret springs of moral actions are made manifest. Such histories instruct us in the knowledge of the human heart, a knowledge which in point of importance is second only to the knowledge of God. The history before us is of this character. Let us lift our hearts to the Father of lights, that we may be instructed. Our text suggests a variety of ideas, to which I shall call your attention in succession.

I. THAT GREAT MEN ARE NOT EXEMPTED FROM THE EVILS WHICH ATTACH TO OUR COMMON NATURE. Naaman was a great man, a commander-in-chief of the Syrian forces, a man honourable and valorous, but he was a leper. From one class of evils riches might exempt their possessors—the evils of poverty, perplexity, anxiety, and embarrassment. But in many cases the opulent, through habits of vice, which are always expensive, or from a silly vanity to appear greater than they really are, participate as largely in these evils as the humblest tradesman. But from other ills they have no exemption.

1. *None from those which attach to the body.* None from affliction in its almost endless diversity, sometimes affecting the body, sometimes the mind, and sometimes both. None from disappointment. Man is the creature of hope, but his hopes are frequently not realized. His heart is fixed upon a particular object, from which he expects to derive perpetual pleasure: but either it is removed out of his sight, or the supplies it sends forth are scanty, and but at intervals; or instead of being a never-failing spring of pleasure, it becomes a fountain of pain, and anguish, and misery. None from death. The sentence is pronounced upon all, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;” which with equal promptness is executed in the palace, as in the cottage, upon the prince, as upon the peasant.

2. *None from those which attach to the soul.* Great men, like others, are involved in the effects of the original transgression: born in sin: in whose nature is sown a corrupt seed which vegetates, without the counteraction of divine grace; grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength, till it becomes a great tree producing wild grapes. Their hearts contain a principle of rebellion, which ramifies itself through all the faculties of the soul, darkening the understanding,—perverting the will,—depraving the affections,—corrupting the memory,—and producing overt acts of rebellion in the life. Great men, like others, “are by nature children of wrath,” and liable to eternal death. But it is pleasing to remark,

II. THAT THERE ARE NO EVILS ATTACHING EITHER TO BODY OR SOUL, WHICH GOD CANNOT REMOVE.

1. *He can heal the body.* This he can do either with or without means. Sometimes he heals miraculously,—such were many of the cures wrought by our Lord, by his apostles,—such also was the resuscitation of the Shunamite’s son by Elisha,—and of Lazarus and the widow’s son by Christ. But though he could have done every thing without means, he has chosen to do almost every thing with them, both in nature, in providence, and in grace. He could have so constituted man as that food should not have been necessary to his sustenance; or he could have caused food to have been spontaneously produced without any labour on his part. But he has done neither. Man requires sustenance; and to obtain it he must plough, and sow, and reap. He could have accomplished all the revolutions which have taken place in the world by his own fiat, without employing a single instrument; but instead of doing so, to accomplish the changes which have been effected, he has employed a Moses—a Cyrus—an Alexander—a Cæsar—a Titus—a Cromwell—a Buonaparte—and a Wellington. He could have irradiated the minds of the whole human race, and perfectly instructed them in the knowledge of his character and will by the immediate inspiration of his own Spirit, without either Bibles or ministers; but he has not done so. On the contrary, in grace, as in nature and providence, he accomplishes the purposes of his will by a continual instrumentality. In

conformity with his general plan, he appoints means in the case before us, ver. 10.

2. *He can heal the soul.* By applying the sacred balm of pardoning mercy to the wounded conscience—by secretly, but powerfully operating upon the will and giving it a new direction—by purifying and elevating the affections—by strengthening the moral powers through the “law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ, making us free from the law of sin and death”—and by making the memory the depository of soul-purifying truths. It is however deeply to be lamented,

III. THAT THE SIMPLICITY OF GOD’S REMEDIES IS FREQUENTLY OFFENSIVE TO THE PRIDE OF MAN. Look at the case before us. What could be more easy than the remedy suggested? “Go and wash in Jordan seven times.” But its simplicity was that which rendered it objectionable with Naaman. Besides, he had previously arranged in his own mind how the cure was to be performed, ver. 11. The patient dictated the plan of his own cure, and because the physician prescribed a different one, he was indignant. This spirit of proud dictation to God, directly opposed to that child-like docility with which we should always contemplate him, has frequently led to the rejection of his plans.

1. *It led the Jews to reject Christ.* They desired the Messiah, as Naaman desired a cure. But as Naaman had previously determined by what process the cure was to be effected, so they had formed in their minds what kind of Messiah he was to be. He was to be a great man, an illustrious prince, and a mighty warrior. He was to emancipate the Jews from vassalage, to conquer the Romans, and to extend his dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. But because their carnal expectations were not realized, they put him to death.

2. *It leads many to reject the peculiar doctrines of the gospel.*—The divinity of Christ,—the doctrine of the atonement,—and spiritual regeneration. Why is the divinity of Christ, for instance, rejected? Because the Scriptures do not teach it? Impossible, for to him they ascribe the name, and attributes, and works, and worship of Jehovah. No, it is because men bring a previous creed to the Bible, instead of deriving their creed from it. They melt the Bible into the

mould of their opinions, instead of melting down their opinions into the mould of the Bible.

3. *It hinders many from closing in with God's method of justifying the ungodly.* He offers a free pardon to men as sinners. The pride of the human heart rejects this, and brings a price—Comparative innocence,—works of righteousness,—acts of charity,—or tears of penitence. The price is already paid and accepted, and the salvation already purchased can only be received by men as sinners who have nothing to pay. There is no royal road to the favour of God, any more than to learning; no, the rigid moralist and the profligate must be justified on the same terms. But,

IV. WHEN GOD'S REMEDIES ARE ADOPTED, THEY NEVER FAIL TO SUCCEED. Look at the case before us, ver. 14. In the cures by the brazen serpent—In the case of the man whose eyes were anointed with clay—In the conversion of St. Paul—Of the Philippian jailer—Of the great cloud of witnesses in every age, and especially of the present. Conclude,

1. *With an address to those who are insensible of their disease.* See how the moral leprosy has affected all your powers.

2. *Address those who desire to be healed.* The Jordan is flowing,—The fountain is open.—Come now, wash and be clean.

OMEGA.

LX. PRAYER PROVED TO BE A PROFITABLE EXERCISE.

JOB xxi. 15.

“What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?”

“I AM the man that hath seen affliction,” said Jeremiah; and with equal propriety might Job have adopted similar language. What affliction did he see in his family; in his

substance ; and in his person ! and how afflictive were the ill-natured and sarcastic reflections attached to his character by his mistaken friends ! They were puzzled to understand why God had thus dealt with Job. As his afflictions were so sudden, so complicated, and so overwhelming, they thought that some secret thing, some hidden wickedness, had drawn down the heavy judgments of God upon him. But Job confutes their unfounded assertions, and vindicates his own character, by showing that this world, though the theatre of crime, is not the scene of punishment. “Wherefore do the wicked live?” &c. ver. 7. Why does not God punish them? They are not afflicted—neither in their persons, “The rod of God,” &c. ver. 9. Nor in their families, “Their seed is established,” &c. ver. 8. Nor in their property, “Their bull gendereth,” &c. ver. 10. Nor have they any inward depression of spirits, “for they take the timbrel and harp,” &c. ver. 12. But this prosperity could not be the result of innocence on their part, or of approbation on the part of God. For “they say unto God, Depart from us,” &c. “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him, and what profit?” &c. That is, there is nothing in God to excite our homage, nor is there any thing in prayer to promote our welfare. Thus the sentiment in the text is as false as it is impious. But let us try to profit by this passage, while we consider,

I. THE EXERCISE ASSUMED—“If we pray unto him.”

II. THE INQUIRY INSTITUTED—“What profit should we have?”

I. THE EXERCISE ASSUMED—“If we pray,” &c. Prayer implies four things :

1. *A consciousness of want.* Man is a needy creature. He wants every thing ! nothing is absolutely his own. Destitution is his inheritance ; if God abandon him, he has nothing, and is nothing. He wants earthly blessings to support his body, and heavenly blessings to sustain and satisfy his mind. But many never pray, because they know not their necessities ; they are ignorant of themselves, of their poverty, guilt, and wretchedness. They are best qualified to pray who know most of themselves.

2. *Prayer supposes an object capable of supplying our wants.* This Being must know our necessities, and possess sufficient benevolence and power to supply them. Such is

the Almighty, who is considered in this verse as the object of prayer. He knows us altogether, and his benevolence is equal to his knowledge, and His name is sufficiently indicative of his power to do us good. Prayers to saints or angels are impious, as they transfer the homage from the Creator to the creature; and absurd, as angels are as dependent as men.

3. *Prayer implies an approach towards the Almighty.* Man is an alien from God; far gone from original righteousness. God is not in all his thoughts. The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, absorb his whole attention. But when he begins to pray, his mind turns towards God. Hence prayer is called feeling after God, looking to him, seeking his face, and pouring out the heart before him.

4. *Prayer includes an expression of our wants.* They who pray speak to God: "Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord," &c., Gen. xviii. 27. "Whiles I was speaking in prayer," &c. Hannah spake in her heart, when she prayed, but her voice was not heard, 1 Sam. i. 13. "When ye pray, say, Our Father," &c. "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord," Hosea xiv. 2. Let us express our wants fully; let us not dissemble nor cloke our sins before the face of Almighty God; but confess them in all their variety, their malignity, and demerit. Let us do it humbly. God is an awful Being: we are not worthy of the least of his mercies. Pride is hateful to God; but "he shall save the humble person." Let us do it importunately: God suffers us to plead with him, Luke xi. 5—10; xviii. 1—7. Do it by faith; and especially do it in the name of Jesus, John xiv. 13, 14.

II. THE INQUIRY INSTITUTED. "What profit should we have?" &c. Selfishness is universally prevalent in the world. Wicked men are invariably selfish men; "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Hence the inquiry concerning profit in the text; and because prayer is deemed unprofitable, therefore it is neglected. But there is no exercise under heaven attended with so much profit as prayer.

1. *Prayer contributes to the removal of evil.*—Of moral evil. Jabez prayed that God would keep him from evil; and God granted him that which he requested. David

said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Of natural evil.—Affliction. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." "Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them," &c., Ps. cvii. 6. Hezekiah prayed, and wept in his affliction, and God said, "Behold, I will heal thee," 2 Kings xx. 5.—Sorrow. "I found," said David, "trouble and sorrow: then called I upon the name of the LORD," &c., Ps. cxvi. 1—4. Christ "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."—Oppression. Look at Israel in Egypt; "I have heard their cry," saith God, "by reason of their taskmasters, and am come down to deliver them," Exod. iii. 7, 8. See Peter shut up in prison; but prayer was made for him, and God delivered him, Acts xii. 5—16, 25.

2. *Prayer is instrumental in procuring good.* All good, for body and soul, for time and eternity, is promised to prayer. Is it profitable to possess wisdom? Yes, "if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself." Wisdom procures happiness, Prov. iii. 13.—Length of days, iii. 16.—Pleasure, ver. 17.—Promotion, Prov. iv. 8.—And glory, iii. 35; iv. 9. But he who never prays is devoid of wisdom. See 1 Kings iii. 9; Dan. ii. 18, 23; James i. 5; Acts x. 31. Is it profitable to possess power? Power to resist the devil, to conquer our corruptions, and to vanquish and put to flight the armies of the aliens? Prayer supplies this strength. "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Ps. cxxxviii. 3. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities; but they who pray most acceptably to God have the largest effusion of that Spirit, Luke xi. 13. Prayer is a most important part of the Christian's armour. Is it profitable to possess protection? See Ps. xviii. 3; lvi. 9. To possess peace? Phil. iv. 6, 7. To have an assurance of heaven? See the penitent thief, Luke xxiii. 42, 43. And the profit of prayer infinitely outweighs all other profit.—It is divine. Worldly profit consists in flocks, herds, money, &c. This, in faith, grace, love, happiness, &c.—It is mental. Worldly profit is sensual, all for the outward man; but he who prays is enriched inwardly; all his intellectual powers are profited.—It is comprehensive. Worldly profit is circumscribed,

and bounded by time; the profit of prayer illimitable.—It is universal. Worldly profit affects us partially; this, in body, and soul, and substance. And the profit arising from prayer is secured without risk, and retained without any fears of deprivation. In conclusion observe,

1. *The conduct of the wicked is impious.* They not only live without prayer, but live as if God had no right to exact this duty of them. “What profit should we have, if we pray?”—But is it optional with you whether to pray or not? Are duties matters of opinion? No, God has made prayer imperative upon you; it is his commandment, and it cannot be violated with impunity.

2. *The conduct of the wicked is erroneous.* They consider prayer a profitless exercise, and therefore neglect it. But this calculation is totally unfounded. Prayer avails much. How strange that men who reason so conclusively in matters of science, should suffer themselves to be so grievously deceived as to the duties of religion!

3. *The conduct of the wicked is ruinous.* Without prayer salvation is unattainable, Prov. i. 24—31.

BETA.

LXI. DAVID'S AFFECTION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD.

PSALM xxvi. 8.

“Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.”

It would be at once presumptuous and imprudent in us to expect to pass through life in circumstances very different from those which usually fall to the lot of our fellow-men; inasmuch as the result of our so doing could only be disappointment and vexation, proportioned to the strength of the

foolish expectation we had formed. Prudence, therefore, would teach us to meet 'the thousand various ills that flesh is heir to,' in a proper spirit; and so to live as to turn them to the best account.

In order to this, we may derive material assistance from our Christian friends; and learn from their counsel and encouragement how 'two are better than one,' &c. And it may also be very useful to us to look backward, and observe how good men of former times conducted themselves while passing through similar scenes.

By this means, we shall discover, that they sometimes derived support from anticipation of a happy result of all their troubles, Job xxiii. 10; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. And that, on other occasions, they fortified their souls by reflecting on the past; and, in either case, by referring their cause to God. "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience," &c., such is the language of an apostle, 2 Cor. i. 12. And similar to this is that of the Psalmist, when exposed to "bloody men, in whose hands was mischief;" "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house," &c. Observe,

I. THE OBJECT OF THE PSALMIST'S AFFECTION. "The habitation," &c. If this Psalm was composed by David, as the prefix to it asserts, then there can be no question as to what particular fabric his declaration refers. It must have respect to the tabernacle of the congregation, described in Exodus xxxvi, a portable building, which was carried from place to place during the journeyings of Israel in the wilderness; and afterwards erected in different places of the land of promise, till it was at length fixed at Jerusalem. This tabernacle was divided into two apartments; the holy place, and the most holy. In the latter of these was the ark of the covenant, the lid or covering of which was the mercy-seat, overshadowed by the wings of "the cherubim of glory," Heb. ix. 5. Upon this, between the cherubim, the cloud of glory, or the symbol of the divine presence, appeared, Lev. xvi. 2. And from this place God communed with Moses, Exod. xxv. 22. So that the Psalmist seems to have respect particularly to this, as the place where Jehovah's honour or glory dwelt. But this "habitation" gave place to Solomon's temple; and that temple was succeeded by another, whose very foundations have been

ploughed up, in fulfilment of the Redeemer's prophecy, Matt. xxiv. 2. Christians, however, are not the less favoured on this account, "for the Word was made flesh," &c., John i. 14. And from him we learn, that neither in Jerusalem nor Gerizim, nor elsewhere exclusively, shall men worship the Father, John iv. 21—24. He "before all temples prefers the upright heart and pure;" and is where "two or three" spiritual worshippers "are gathered together." If therefore we are so assembled, we may say, "surely this is none other than the house of God." But to return to our text. It is observable that,

1. *The Psalmist's was an ardent affection.* So much so, that he thinks fit to make particular mention of it to the "heart-searching God," when he wished to interest him in his favour. Such the address of Peter, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

2. *The Psalmist's was a constant affection.* "Lord, I have loved," formerly. But the same affection still prevailed. "Out of the abundance of the heart," his mouth spake. He turned to the subject with pleasure, ver. 7. Hence it appears, that,

3. *The Psalmist's was a practical affection.* "I will compass thine altar," &c. ver. 6, 7. He was not a mere professor, of which there have been but too many in all ages. We do not mean here, those whose tongues and purses are ready on every public occasion; but those who profess to be friendly to religious institutions, while they withhold every thing, but good words and wishes. David was a man of practice; such should we be.

II. THE REASON OF THE PSALMIST'S AFFECTION. From an endless variety we select a few, which apply equally to his case and our own. He "loved," &c., and we should,

1. *Because of the Proprietor's residence there.* 'Tis not only the property, but "the habitation" of my friend, my benefactor, my God; "the tabernacle of thy honour," (margin) and therefore I love it. See Ps. xxvii. 4. The tabernacle itself was not what David thought God's house should be, 2 Sam. vii. 2. Yet, as God's house, he set his heart on it. There may be other inducements to our attendance on church or chapel: it may be an elegant place, the music may be good, the preacher attractive, &c.; or we may be bound by personal interest or honour to give

the place our support. But let us remember that just as much of respect to God as there is in our service, just so far it is good, and no farther.

2. *Because of the company he furnishes.* We do not mean to affirm, that all who regularly attend public worship are as good as they should be; yet we must contend, that they are better than others in general. Those who attend no place of worship, are usually not more above the brutes in point of intellect, than below them in the abuse of intellect. Whereas those who "wait upon the Lord," while they evince a better state of mind already existing, obtain a still greater degree of liberty from wicked or worldly enthrallments; and become more unlike the beast and devil, and more like those pure and happy spirits which worship before the throne above. Hence the propriety of the poet's language,

" Lord, how delightful 'tis to see
A whole assembly worship thee," &c.

3. *Because of the blessings it affords.* Correct affections are profitable ones. If we worship in the beauty of holiness, we shall not do it in vain. In God's house we may be blessed in a review of the past. While the preacher dwells on the subject of Christian experience, we may remember how, when, where, the Lord arrested us; may review our self-loathing, our contrition and tears, our panting after the Saviour, till it pleased God to reveal his Son in us, &c., and how since then "He hath preserved our souls from death," &c. And in our Father's house there is still bread enough and to spare, and therefore we may be blessed with present supplies. To this purpose the Psalmist: "They shall be abundantly satisfied," &c., Ps. xxxvi. 7—9. And here we may indulge the happiest anticipations. Thus David, after expressing his desire, Ps. xxvii. 4, proceeds, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me," &c., ver. 5, 6, 10, 14.

4. *Because of the habits it induces.* Habits formed by holy exercises, and which qualify for the felicities of heaven. Heaven is indeed a place of happiness, but it is such only to souls fitted for its holy employments. In general, though persons may bear, or even like a little religion, as furnishing out variety, yet they must not be

troubled with too much of it, must not be confined at it too long; whereas those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness," feel delight in those pious devotions by which they are trained up for the exercises of the blessed. So that they may not unfrequently say,

" My happy soul would stay
In such a frame as this ;
And sit, and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss."

By the way, we may remark how it happens that some persons lose, by degrees, all relish for divine things. They do not guard against the effect which custom has on habit. At first, family affairs, or perhaps personal affliction, detains them from the house of God, and they have no apprehension of sustaining loss, beyond their present privation. After awhile, however, their souls get into a cold, lifeless condition; and when the impediment is removed, they have contracted a habit of indolence, and lost their inclination towards even the public forms of godliness. O, let us exercise the affection while we may, and cherish it when in confinement; that still it may live and influence us! The evils of present negligence, or the advantages of present diligence, will be felt in a time of sickness, &c. That is a time to enjoy religion, not to seek it. Cultivate therefore, now, the spirit and conduct of the Psalmist, "Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto you."

ZETA.

LXII. A MISSIONARY DISCOURSE.

PSALM xliv. 1—5.

" My heart is inditing a good matter."

THE Bible is in many instances the best comment upon itself; hence, the primitive method of preaching was,

"comparing spiritual things with spiritual." How many parts of the Old Testament are explained in the New! How frequently do the inspired writers of the latter make their appeals to the former, to confirm the truth of the doctrines they advanced! Jesus Christ himself did this. "These are the words," said he, "which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me." Among the things that concern Christ in the Psalms, the text holds a conspicuous rank. Some have deemed this psalm a nuptial song, composed in honour of Solomon's marriage with the daughter of the king of Egypt; but with all due deference to such high authority, we have a considerable degree of hesitation in subscribing to this opinion. In the verse subsequent to the text, the Psalmist, speaking of the same person, whom he had characterized as a mighty hero in the third verse, says, "Thy throne, O God," &c. And that this peculiarly applies to Christ, the apostle places beyond all doubt. See Heb. i. 8, 9. We therefore consider this text as referring entirely to the Messiah. We have here,

I. A PREFACE OR INTRODUCTION TO WHAT FOLLOWS. "My heart is inditing," &c. In the preface we have three things: A subject, called "a good matter," &c.—A source whence it proceeded, "My heart is inditing," &c.—A manner of expression, "My tongue is the pen," &c.

1. *The subject.* "A good matter;"—"things touching the King." Christ is the king. The things that concern Christ as a king, are the dignity of his person—the wisdom and equity of his government—the extent of his dominions—the happiness of his subjects—and the perpetuity of his reign.—This is "good matter." It is illustrative of the character of Him who is essential goodness. It has occupied the attention of the best beings in creation. And the nearer we approximate towards a perfection of goodness, the more this "good matter" will occupy our attention.

2. *A source whence it proceeded.* "My heart is inditing." Many things are spoken with the lips, in which the heart has little interest. Thousands say what they never mean. But the Psalmist spoke out of the abundance of his heart; "My heart is inditing," boiling or bubbling up, in allusion to water put in motion by the action of fire, or

· bubbling up from a spring. How the love of Christ will constrain us to speak of him !

3. *A manner of expression.* “My tongue is the pen,” &c. Writing was always a necessary exercise ; but in the early periods of the world, before printing was invented, it was peculiarly needful. Some were eminent for handling the pen of the writer, Judges v. 14. Many imitate the Psalmist in the fluency of their speech ; they talk rapidly, but alas ! they talk wickedly. Others converse freely, and piously ; but incoherently, enthusiastically, and erroneously. The Psalmist here spoke of the things he had made and studied concerning the King. Let us always think before we speak ; and let our words be seasoned with grace, that we may minister grace to the hearers. Next to the preface, or introduction, we have,

II. A DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTER. “Thou art fairer,” &c.

1. *In his person.* He is “fairer than the children of men.” Was not the personal appearance of Christ beautiful ? Is there any thing unreasonable in supposing that he who possessed all the fulness of the Godhead bodily had peculiar personal attractions ? that he, whose mind was never ruffled by an improper temper, should have beauty and serenity beaming in his countenance ? Isaiah indeed said, that he had “no form, nor comeliness, nor beauty, that we should desire him.” But did not this refer to the scandal of his cross ? But there is moral as well as physical beauty. There are mental endowments, which in the sight of God are of great price. In this respect, especially, Christ was fairer than the children of men. How holy was his human soul ! What wisdom, and love, and patience, and humility did he possess ! And in addition to all human adornments, he had the glory of the only begotten of the Father ; he had essential and uncreated beauties. The Redeemer is described,

2. *In his address.* “Grace is poured into thy lips.” He not only possessed a plenitude of grace, for his own support in the arduous work in which he was engaged, but that he might instruct and console others. Grace was poured into his lips. The gospel of the grace of God, with all its rich displays, kind invitations, and gracious promises, was committed to him ; and this gospel he explained, unfolded, and

enforced, with such sweetness, majesty, and authority, as to excite the astonishment of all who heard him, Luke iv. 15, 22; John vii. 46. The Messiah is designated,

3. *By the commendation of Jehovah.* "God hath blessed thee," &c. To bless signifies to extol, to commend, or speak well of. God hath extolled his Son in the ascriptions of Divine titles, honours, and perfections to him. Extolled him in his mediatorial capacity, Matt. iii. 16, 17. In the homage and adoration which he has commanded the highest order of created beings to pay him, Heb. i. 6. In the high and exalted situation to which he has raised him, Phil. ii. 9. Blessed him in making him an everlasting blessing to men. All blessings flow to us from him: "Men shall be blessed in him," Psalm lxxviii. 18. And shall not men bless Him, whom God hath blessed for ever? Rev. v. 11—14.

III. A PETITION ADDRESSED TO THE MESSIAH, "Gird thy sword," &c. Here Christ is characterized as a mighty hero, or dignified conqueror, going forth to battle. We have,

1. *The cause he maintains.* It is not political warfare. He makes war, not to dethrone monarchs, but to subdue vices; not to destroy men's lives, but to save their souls. His is the cause of truth, meekness, and righteousness.—*Truth in opposition to error.* All the systems of religion that men have invented, have been assemblages of human errors. Christ taught the truth, and nothing but the truth. He gave men true ideas of God, of himself, of the Holy Ghost, of sin, religion, &c.—*Truth in opposition to shadow.* The Jewish religion was a religion of shadows, types, and ceremonies. Christ was the substance, and the archetype of what was represented in the law.—*Truth in contradistinction to prophecy.* The prophets prophesied of the grace that should come unto us; and what they said was by way of promise. Christ accomplished and fulfilled all righteousness. Wherever religion prevails, there truth is known, loved, and practised. Sin is a system of lying, fraud, deception, and error. Deception is the basis of crime. But all that appertains to Christianity, harmonizes with truth.—*The cause of Christ is the cause of meekness.* Worldly warfare is the child of wrath; and fury, and malevolence, are its inseparable companions. And the Jewish doctors tolerated a religion which said, "an eye

for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But nothing could surpass the meekness and gentleness of Christ; and his disciples were to be formed on the same plan: "Learn of me," &c. Matt. xi. 29.—*The cause of Christ is the cause of righteousness.* He himself is the Lord of righteousness; and his laws, requirements, people, and kingdom, are all righteous.

2. *The manner how the Psalmist expected the Messiah to achieve his victories.* "Gird thy sword," &c. This is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, the gospel of our salvation, Heb. iv. 12; Rev. i. 16. The power of the gospel surpasses all description, Rom. i. 16; 2 Cor. iv. 7; 1 Thess. i. 5. With what glory, and majesty, did Christ redeem, by the preaching of his gospel in the first ages of Christianity! Idols fell, temples were demolished, oracles struck dumb, the reign of the devil circumscribed, and whole crowds presented themselves at the foot of the cross. And what triumphs and victories hath the Redeemer achieved by the preaching of his gospel, even in our day! Let us also notice,

3. *The interest which the Psalmist took in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom.* He prays, "Gird thy sword," &c. See Psalm xc. 16, 17; cxviii. 25; 2 Thess. iii. 1. The same spirit pervades all Christians. They love Christ, and pray, "Ride on prosperously," &c. They love truth, and meekness, and righteousness: and this prompts them to adopt the language of the text. They love the souls of men, and they know that in proportion as Christ extends his triumphs, sinners are saved, the devil is disappointed of his hope, and hell of its expectation.

4. *The confidence of success expressed.* "Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things: thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies," &c. "Thy right hand," &c. This means that his mighty power should accomplish amazing and miraculous works; for "with authority and power he commanded the unclean spirits," &c., Luke iv. 36. The sharp arrows, which pierce the hearts of the King's enemies, are intended to represent convictions of sin. "The arrows of the Almighty are within me," &c., Job vi. 4. "Thine arrows stuck fast in me," Psalm xxxviii. 2. Thus, Peter's hearers were pricked in their hearts, Acts ii. 37. And as arrows in the flesh produce

the most acute feelings, so convictions for sin fill us with the most alarming apprehensions, and lead us to sue for mercy at the throne of grace. "Whereby the people fall under thee." Then prejudice, and pride, and self-confidence, all give way, and the sinner sinks into the dust, abashed, humbled, and confounded. Let us learn from the text,

1. The exalted character of the Messiah.

2. The nature of that glorious warfare which he is carrying on upon earth, for the rescue of his immortal offspring from the galling yoke of sin, and the usurped dominion of the devil.

3. The delight which we should feel in speaking on this interesting subject, and the prayers which we should offer up for its promotion.

4. The confident expectation we may entertain of its final triumph.

BETA.

LXIII. THE DUTY OF TRUSTING IN GOD.

PSALM lxii. 8.

"Trust in him at all times : ye people, pour out your hearts before him : God is a refuge for us."

THE royal Psalmist was not only a man of extensive knowledge, but also of deep piety and eminent devotion. He was intimately acquainted with the Lord his God, and lived in habits of hallowed intercourse and communion with him. His confidence was strong and active, and was frequently accompanied with unspeakable joy and consolation. This certainly appears to have been his happy experience when he composed the Psalm before us. Though it contains neither prayer nor praise, it is peculiarly interesting and instructive. It principally consists of David's professions

of faith and hope in the God of his salvation ; and of earnest exhortations to others, to trust in his mercy and call on his name. Such is evidently the import of the language selected for our present consideration ;—"Trust in him at all times," &c. In these words we have an interesting fact asserted,—an important duty enjoined,—and an encouraging direction urged. Observe,

I. AN INTERESTING FACT ASSERTED. "God is a refuge for us." This is a fact in which all mankind are deeply interested. If God be not our refuge, we are undone, and must finally perish in our sins. But, thank the Lord, he has not left us without help. He "hath remembered us in our low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever." Let us therefore never forget the two following points of doctrine :

1. *Our circumstances require a refuge.* We are naturally depraved, ignorant, guilty, condemned, and perishing sinners. Having forsaken the fountain of living waters, we are become wretched, miserable, and helpless ; "having no hope, and without God in the world," Eph. ii. 12. In this deplorable state of impiety and misery, the wrath of God abideth on us, and we are exposed to eternal perdition as the natural result and just demerit of our innumerable transgressions. It is an undeniable truth, that we have destroyed ourselves ; but "in God is found our help," Rom. vi. 23. A deep conviction of our sinful state, and utter insufficiency, will ever extort the cry, "Save, Lord, or I perish ;" and a knowledge of divine mercy will encourage our faith and hope in the Lord, Psalm cxxx. 7, 8.

2. *A refuge is provided for mankind.* "God is a refuge for us." Deplorably wretched as we are, the Almighty condescends to become, through the mediation of his beloved Son, our "strength and our Redeemer." He was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and "laid on him the iniquity of us all." He is therefore the divinely appointed "hiding-place" of sinners, and "the stronghold" of his people, Isaiah xxxii. 2. In him they find refuge from the curse of the broken law, the guilt of sin, the reproaches of conscience, the malice of their enemies in every time of trouble, and from the miseries of eternal destruction, Psalm xviii. 1—3. He is an almighty, all-sufficient, and everlasting refuge, which is always accessible, and never fails to protect, deliver, and comfort, such as

"lay hold on the hope set before them," Prov. xviii. 10. To him then let us come with humble confidence, rejoicing in the consolatory fact, that "God is a refuge for us." The text also contains,

II. AN IMPORTANT DUTY ENJOINED. "Trust in him at all times." This is both the imperious duty, and the highest interest of every human being. It is therefore highly necessary to consider its import and properties, as described in the words before us.

1. *The object of this duty is noticed.* "In Him;" that is, in God, of whom David says, "He only is my rock and my salvation." He has been the refuge and confidence of the righteous from the beginning, Psalm xxii. 3—5. He is the only object in which we can trust, with safety and advantage. All others are broken reeds, and refuges of falsehood. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." We must implicitly trust in his infinite wisdom, power, goodness, and truth; knowing that he is the God of all grace, and the donor of every good and perfect gift. Let us then renounce all creature confidence, and "trust in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," Psalm cxv. 9—11.

2. *The nature of this duty is asserted.* "Trust in him." This implies knowledge, for we cannot trust in a being with whom we have no acquaintance, Psalm ix. 10. Attachment, for we shall never be disposed to confide in an object we do not love, Psalm cxvi. 1, 2. Dependence, which includes a full renunciation of all self-righteousness, and an implicit affiance in the Divine character and promises; with a devout expectation of every needful blessing, Isaiah xii. 2. Obedience, for personal trust in God is an operative principle; and is always evinced by its practical fruits, in a holy life, and heavenly conversation, Rom. xii. 1. It is an entire surrender both of body and soul to God, through the merits of the Redeemer, in confident hope of present salvation, and eternal life, Rom. xiv. 7, 8. It is an essential property of pure religion, and the distinguishing character of the righteous, Psalm xxxi. 19.

3. *The period of this duty is specified.* "At all times." There is no season in the whole compass of human existence when it is not needful to trust in the Lord. We are in-

variably dependent upon him for "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." And hence we ought to trust in him in times of prosperity and adversity, in times of temptation and trial, in times of health and affliction, Psalm l. 15.—In youth, in old age, in death, and for ever.—In the discharge of every duty, the enjoyment of every privilege, and in the anticipation of all necessary good, 1 Pet. v. 7; Heb. iv. 16. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." To such characters we have, in the text,

III. AN ENCOURAGING DIRECTION URGED. "Ye people, pour out your hearts before him." In this appropriate advice two things are observable, both of which are highly instructive, and well calculated to promote the spirit of devotion.

1. *The import of prayer is stated.* "*Pour out your heart.*" Spiritual worship does not consist in any external ceremonies, however correct; nor in the repetition of any particular forms of language, Matt. xv. 8. It is the work of the heart. All the powers of the soul must be engaged with the object of our devotion. We must pray "with the spirit, and with the understanding also." The Almighty looks at the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts, John iv. 24. The soul must be breathed to heaven under the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, Psalm xxv. 1; Jude 20. All our wants and desires, complaints and sorrows, hopes and fears, must be spread before the Lord, in the solemnities of his worship. The whole heart must be developed, or poured out before him, in "prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving."

2. *The order of prayer is observed.* "*Pour out your heart before him.*" We should ever consider ourselves under the eye of Jehovah, in the exercises of religion, and realize his sacred presence. "Thou, God, seest me," is a sentiment that should deeply impress our minds at all times; but especially in our addresses to the throne of grace. Whenever we engage in devotional services, whether public or private, we are considered as withdrawing from the world, and appearing more immediately before God, Matt. vi. 6. By prayer we come to him, draw near to him, plead with him, and "order our cause before him." This solemn truth will greatly tend to banish every distracting

care, and secure our spiritual profit, Isaiah xl. 31. It will counteract the baneful influence of hypocrisy and formality, and promote a spirit of holy reverence, sincerity, and watchfulness. To conclude; we may infer,

1. The duty and interest of trusting in God. In him only have we refuge and strength. Flee then to him, and "put your trust under the shadow of his wings."

2. The sin and folly of neglecting prayer. Take warning, ye prayerless sinners, and repent. "Awake to righteousness, and pray without ceasing."

ETA.

LXIV. THE GENERAL EXTENSION OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM FERVENTLY IMPORED.

PSALM lxxii. 18, 19.

"Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen."

THE Psalm before us is entitled, "A Psalm for Solomon," and appears to have been composed by David in the decline of life, when he set his beloved son on the throne of Israel. Hence the primary design of this Psalm undoubtedly was, to describe the nature and effects of Solomon's excellent administration. But though this is admitted, yet we may conclude that "a greater than Solomon" is here ultimately referred to; for the description, thus given, can properly apply only to the kingdom of Christ, the Prince of peace, the great antitype of Solomon. This is evident,

1. *From the extent of his authority.* "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him. All men shall be blessed in him, all nations shall call him blessed," ver. 8, 11, 17.

2. *From the benefits enjoyed by his subjects.* See ver. 4, 12, 14. The poor, the needy, the oppressed, and helpless supplicants ever engage his compassionate attention; and he redeems their souls from the violence and wiles of the infernal oppressor.

3. *From the duration of his kingdom.* It will continue throughout all generations, and will remain as long as the sun and moon endure, ver. 5, 7, 17. This interesting subject having filled and enraptured the vigorous mind of our sweet Psalmist, he concludes his sublime composition in the glowing language of the text, "Blessed be the Lord God," &c. In improving our text we may consider it,

I. AS A PROPHETIC ORACLE. Thus considered, it assures us,

1. *That the whole earth will be filled with God's glory.* As the Spirit of the Lord thus spake by David, this is in perfect harmony with the various other predictions; see Isa. xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14. The glory of the Lord implies, *A display of his perfections in the salvation of mankind.* This appears from the prayer of Moses, Exod. xxxiii. 18, and God's answer to this prayer. Compare ver. 19, with chap. xxxiv. 5—7. It also implies, *The pious acknowledgment of God's saving goodness,* as by the churches of Judea, on hearing of Paul's conversion, Gal. i. 22—24. The whole earth being filled with God's glory must therefore include, the conscious enjoyment of God's saving goodness, and the pious acknowledgment thereof by mankind in general; which is supposed by what John witnessed in his prophetic vision, Rev. vii. 9, 10. As our text leads us to expect this, so it assures us,

2. *That the earth will be filled with God's glory, by means of Christ's administration in his mediatorial kingdom.* This is justly inferable from the petition hereby suggested, "And let," &c. It is plainly intimated by our Lord's prayer, Luke xi. 2. And it is expressly affirmed by the prophet, Isa. lxi. 1—3: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," &c. We may consider our text,

II. AS A SOURCE OF SACRED INSTRUCTION. Thus considered, it teaches us,

1. *That Christ is a divine person:* "The Lord God of Israel." It is Christ that visited and redeemed his people; and he that visited and redeemed his people is the Lord God of Israel. Of this we are assured, By the most credible

testimony. That of prophets : of David, see Psa. xlv. 6, and cx. 1 ; of Isaiah, chap. ix. 6 ; and of Jeremiah, chap. xxiii. 5, 6. Of evangelists : as Matthew, chap. i. 22, 23 ; and John, chap. i. 1. And of apostles : as Thomas, John xx. 28 ; Paul, Rom. ix. 5 ; and James, chap. ii. 1. By the most incontestible facts : as his creation of all things, Col. i. 16 ; his preservation of all things, Col. i. 17 ; and his raising himself from the dead, John ii. 19, 21.

2. *That his regal acts are wondrous* : he doeth wondrous things. He did wondrous things as the God of Israel, in behalf of his Hebrew subjects, by delivering them from grievous bondage, by preserving them amidst a dangerous wilderness, and by blessing them with a desirable inheritance, Psa. cxxxvi. 10—23. He still doeth wondrous things as the King of saints, in behalf of his Christian subjects, by delivering them from a worse than Egyptian bondage, Matt. xi. 28 ; John viii. 36 ; by preserving them amidst most alarming dangers, Psa. xvii. 7 ; John x. 27, 28 ; and by blessing them with a better country than that of the earthly Canaan, Heb. xiii. 14, chap. xi. 16 ; 1 Pet. i. 3—5. We may consider our text,

III. AS AN EXAMPLE OF ACCEPTABLE DEVOTION. Thus considered, we are led to regard it as containing,

1. *Grateful adoration*. “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, and blessed be his glorious name for ever.” Hereby we are taught that God should be praised for his wondrous works. To praise God for his goodness is our duty, for he requires it by express injunctions, Psa. l. 14, and cvii. 1, 8, &c. To praise God is our honour, for this is the most disinterested part of devotion ; more so than that of deprecation and petition, in which we refer to our own interests. At the same time, praise renders our worship most like the worship of heaven, Rev. xv. 3. To praise God is our wisdom. This duty is attended with pleasure, Psa. cxlvii., and is the means of obtaining renewed favours, Psa. l. 23. We are led to regard this example as containing,

2. *Humble acknowledgment*. “Who only doeth wondrous things.” This should be the language of all Christ’s gracious subjects, for they are saved, not by their own merit, but through God’s mercy, Tit. iii. 6, 7. This should also be the language of all God’s honoured instruments, for

God's work is effected by his own agency. It is he who removes all hindrances that would impede the labours of his servants, Zec. iv. 6, 7; and it is he alone who crowns their labours with success, 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. We are led to regard this example as also containing,

3. *Fervent desire.* "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen, and Amen." It is desirable that the whole earth may be filled with God's glory, on principles both of piety and benevolence. On principles of piety, because hereby the felicity of angels will be augmented, Luke xv. 10; the most pleasing satisfaction will be afforded to our gracious Redeemer, Isa. liii. 10, 11; and God will become generally honoured by the human race, Mal. i. 11. On principles of benevolence; for hereby much moral evil, or sin, will be prevented, James v. 19, 20; much natural evil, or misery, will be avoided, as national judgments, 2 Chron. vii. 14; political discord, Isa. ii. 4; and the eternal death of immortal souls, James v. 20; and much good, or human happiness, will be occasioned. This happiness will be enjoyed by penitent individuals, on their obeying the gospel, Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16; by pious families, through domestic concord, Psal. cxviii. 15; and by the redeemed in heaven, Isa. xxxv. 10. From this interesting subject we may infer,

1. *The certain fulfilment of God's purpose to fill the earth with his glory.* This event is certain: from God's promise to his Son, Psal. ii. 6, 8; from the immutability of his counsel: this no device of God's enemies can alter, Job xxiii. 13; Prov. xix. 21; and from the perfections of Christ as the God of Israel: his unbounded mercy, Psal. cxxx. 6, 7; his inviolable truth, Heb. vi. 17, 18; and his uncontrollable power, Dan. iv. 35. We should also infer from our text,

2. *The propriety of concurring with God in fulfilling his purpose.* We are all capable of thus concurring with him; by prompt personal subjection to Christ's authority, Psal. ii. 12; by a due improvement of our talents, 1 Pet. iv. 10; by our examples, Rom. xiv. 18; and our prayers, Isa. lxii. 6, 7. Such concurrence is required of all Christ's followers. This appears from God's inquiries, Psal. xciv. 16; commands, Prov. iii. 27; Gal. vi. 10; and threatening, Judges v. 23. And to engage in this concurrence is our

interest. For those who approve themselves as the called, and chosen, and faithful servants of Christ on earth, shall be for ever with him in heaven, Rev. xvii. 14.

ALPHA.

LXV. JEHOVAH'S REIGN MATTER OF JOY TO ALL.

PSALM xcvi. 1, 2.

“The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.”

ON what occasion this psalm was penned is uncertain. The Talmudic doctors, by a forced criticism, attribute it to Moses; while some Christian commentators ascribe it to David, though it wants his name. Those that ascribe it to David, judge that it refers to the establishment of his throne after Absalom's rebellion. But later critics attribute it to some unknown author, and suppose it to have been written after the return of the Jews from Babylon. It opens with the language of exultation, “The Lord reigneth,” as is evident from the restoration of his people, notwithstanding the intention of their enemies: their design was to destroy us, but he has overruled it. Some deny his being, and many more his government; yet still he reigns. But the sin of the multitude is to blame his government as unwise, and harsh, if not unjust; nevertheless, he reigns in righteousness, &c. We observe,

I. THAT ALL THINGS ARE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE LORD JEHOVAH. “The Lord reigneth,” &c. Unhumbled reason says that all things in the natural world are under the government of merely natural and mechanical causes; and that all things in the intellectual and moral, spring from the uninfluenced agency of the human mind: but such is not the doctrine of the text; it declares that all things are under the government of the Most High. For whenever dominion is thus absolutely ascribed to him, it

intimates that his empire is universal, and his will imperative.

1. The absolute dependence of every creature in the universe on God, for its being and capacities, proclaims his reign to every reflecting nature. Nor,

2. Can the creation of moral agents deprive him of his parental right, as the loving Father of the human family, to control all events for the general good of man. While,

3. The perfections of his nature, and the relation in which he stands to every creature, especially to every intelligent and saved creature, require that he should (so far as it can be done without destroying man's accountability) overrule all the conduct of free creatures, for their individual and eternal good. But Christians should never forget that God the Father has vested, and exercises, this right of government in the person of his Son, John v. 22, 23. And he has placed all power in his hands, because he has constituted him the only and universal Saviour, Matt. xi. 27, and John xiii. 3. Before his incarnation, this kingdom was sustained by him as the promised and predicted Son of man, Dan. vii. 14, and ix. 25. And since his incarnation he has sustained it under the titles of Prince and Saviour, Acts v. 31; God over all, blessed for ever, Rom. ix. 5; and King of kings, and Lord of lords, Rev. xix. 16. And, perhaps, I shall be justified in saying, that there is not a being in the universe, good or bad, intelligent or unintelligent, but what instrumentally contributes to the ends and purposes of this sovereignty; on which account it is, that Jesus Christ is said to have power over all flesh, and even all power in heaven and earth. But observe,

II. SOME PARTS OF THIS DIVINE ADMINISTRATION ARE MYSTERIOUS AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO MEN. "Clouds and darkness are round about him."

1. These congregated vapours, called clouds, which are exhaled by the sun, and buoyed up at various distances from us by the atmosphere, more or less intercept the rays of the sun in their passage to us: but it is the total withdrawal of the sun's rays from our hemisphere that produces darkness. When clouds and darkness are said to be round about the person and administration of Jehovah, the language, of course, is figurative; for clouds and darkness cannot hide these from us, as they do material objects.

The use of such language is to teach us that we neither do nor can see the wisdom, goodness, and glory, of some of his governing acts. Should any ask, But why can we not see these things? We reply, that certainly it is not owing to any deficiency of these excellencies in his government; but if we may be permitted to say so, it is owing to an excess or redundancy of these glorious perfections. As Milton sublimely words it, He is dark with 'excessive bright;' or, as one yet more eloquent and sublime than Milton has phrased it, "He dwells in light that is inaccessible, which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see. His judgments are deep and unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." Hence, at times, his paths are no more to be traced than that of a ship in the sea, or of an eagle in the air, Prov. xxx. 19. With the greatest propriety therefore we may ask, Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? Or who is able to receive the perfect revelation of it? And because none could receive his counsel, even if it were revealed to him, hence it is that he is said to be great in counsel, and wonderful in working. In some things we may grope after him by the glimmerings of reason alone; but by the light of revelation we see much more of the glory of his counsels and operations. Yet still, some parts of his way lie so much beyond the reach of our intellect, as to appear to us absolutely irreconcilable with his known perfections.

2. Others, by the clouds and darkness which are said to surround this great King, understand his terror to his and his people's enemies; as, to Pharaoh and his host. But however mysterious the proceedings of Jehovah to his subjects are, they are all ordered in equity and goodness. For observe,

III. THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUDGMENT ARE THE HABITATION OF HIS THRONE. His kingdom is founded on righteousness; established by righteousness; and is set up to promote and perpetuate its reign.

1. *It is founded on righteousness.* For this reign of God over mankind, in and by Jesus Christ, is gracious, and therefore necessarily implies a relaxation of his right to punish, and the adoption of an expedient to pardon and save the sinner, without countenancing his sin. And what expedient has he

adopted to display the terrors of his holiness and justice in pardoning sin? The death of Jesus. It is therefore to the righteousness and merit of his death that we owe the substitution of the reign of leniency for that of rigour. It is the bleeding cross that hath promised all, and sworn eternal grace. There it is that blessings clustering rush on us in a throng, and close us round. It is this hath brought the reign of grace unto us.

2. *The throne of God is established by righteousness.* Under his government a perfect discrimination of character exists, while the utmost impartiality is observed in rendering to every one his due, as, justice to every degree of delinquency unrepented of; mercy and gentleness to every returning and obedient soul; and nothing but wisdom and love towards such as are upright in heart. And this righteous procedure gives stability and permanency to the throne of Jesus Christ. All other thrones will fall; and there will be a period when they become unnecessary, and when they will crumble into dust. But there will never be a period when the reign of Christ will not be for the good of men, and necessary to their welfare. Hence, of his government and peace there shall be no end, &c. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, &c. Hence the strength of the terms by which its perpetuity is set forth, "Thy throne, O God," &c.

3. *This throne is to contribute to the diffusion and universal reign of righteousness.* It shews to men its importance; it commands them to follow after it; and multiplies the means of spreading it. For these reasons we observe,

IV. THAT JEHOVAH'S REIGN IS MATTER OF JOY TO ALL. "The Lord reigneth," &c. Such a reign can hurt none but evil persons; nor yet can it hurt them, until they become determinately and incorrigibly evil; while those who are resolved on living piously, and who for that reason are exposed to reproach and persecution, derive the greatest advantage from it, being shielded from it by the malice and rage of their persecutors. And since it rescues men from all their miseries, saves them from all their inquietude in seasons of reflection, and renders them independent of all the sensual, noisy, and inconstant joys of earth, raising them to the participation of intellectual, evangelical, abundant, and abiding joys;—in short, seeing it communicates

and secures all the good of earth and heaven;—well may all be called to rejoice in it: “Let the earth rejoice.” A reign that exists for the good of earth, and is to be commensurate with it, is justly a cause of joy to all.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since Jehovah reigns, let us be on our guard against all the atheism, scepticism, and pride of philosophy; endeavouring to fill our minds with the doctrine of the text, for our direction and comfort.

2. As Jehovah’s administration, in many parts of it, is too deep for us to fathom, let us not curiously pry into its mysteries; but judge of them by those parts which are naked and open to us.

3. Since Jehovah’s government is founded on justice and kindness, let us endeavour to avoid the penalties and secure the blessings of his reign.

4. Since Jehovah’s reign is matter of joy to all, let us rejoice in its approach, and, to the best of our ability, promote its spread and continuance.

IOTA.

LXVI. THE EXCELLENCY OF UNION.

PSALM cxxxiii. 1.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

AMONGST the numerous excellencies which are connected with true religion, the delightful union of which it is productive holds a very distinguished place. Through the influence of religion, men, whose condition in life, disposition of mind, mode of education, and regular habitudes, have been not only widely different, but also directly opposed to each other, have become so closely united, that

even heathenism, with all its inveterate opposition to revealed truth, has been constrained to attest, "See how these Christians love!" And this interesting union has not been confined to the Christian dispensation, but was manifestly a striking feature in the piety of rural and patriarchal times; and it also constituted a distinguished excellency in the Jewish church. David bears testimony to its existence in his day, exclaiming, in the spirit of admiration, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is," &c. It is very probable that this psalm was composed on the termination of that civil war which had so long prevailed between the two houses of Saul and David; yet this language may very properly be applied, in reference to the harmony of religious societies or Christian churches. In thus using this portion of Scripture, we shall,

I. DEFINE THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURAL UNION.

II. ASSERT ITS TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE. And,

III. SPECIFY THE MEANS OF ITS PROMOTION.

I. DEFINE THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURAL UNION. This union may be considered as including—*Sentiment—Affection—Design—and Operation.*

1. *A oneness of sentiment.* Whilst the different denominations of Christians, in consequence of their early associations and impressions having been widely different, entertain notions contrary to each other on various subjects of minor importance, yet on the grand essential truths of Christianity they are one. The fall, and consequent depravity of man; the divinity and atonement of Christ; the necessity and reality of the operations of the Holy Ghost; and justification by faith alone, are doctrines which form a kind of central point, at which the Christian tribes meet and sing,

"Let names, and sects, and parties fall,
And Jesus Christ be all in all."

This is manifest by their writings, their public ministrations, and their union of defence when these truths are assailed.

2. *A union in point of affection.* All those who are the "children of God by faith," maintaining the same common principles, influenced by the same powerful motives, participating the same spiritual enjoyments, and bearing the

same divine image, are the subjects of a mutual and tender affection, which expresses itself by various acts of kindness, such as administering to each other's necessities, steadily watching over each other's interests, studiously labouring to promote each other's happiness, and patiently bearing with each other's infirmities, Rom. xii. 5—10; Heb. vi. 10; 1 Pet. i. 22; Gal. vi. 2; Heb. x. 32—34; 1 John iii. 16, 17.

3. *A sameness of principle, and a union of heart, are very naturally productive of a similarity of design.* And Christians generally, and with steady uniformity, purpose to secure their own final salvation,—to endeavour instrumentally to effect the salvation of their friends and neighbours,—to extend the kingdom of the Redeemer in the earth, having for their ultimate object the glory of God, Acts xxiv. 16; Rom. x. 1, xiv. 7, 8; 1 Cor. x. 31.

4. *Operation.* In this distinguished age of light and glory, the followers of Christ generally agree to merge their little differences on minor points of faith, in a unity of effort to accomplish the grand object of their mutual purpose. If we turn our attention to school institutions, to Bible societies, and to Missionary establishments, we shall delightfully behold Christians of all denominations rallying round the common standard, and marching on to certain conquest.

II. ASSERT ITS TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE. There are many things which are very good, but not pleasant; while other things, which, to the vitiated inclinations of a depraved heart, appear delightful, are in reality injurious and destructive; but scriptural union is both “good and pleasant.” This will appear, if we consider,

1. *Its moral fitness.* The union of the Christian church is in exact agreement with the nature and perfections of God, John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 8—10. Correspondent with the great designs of mercy in the gospel of Christ, Eph. ii. 13; Col. i. 20—22. And strictly congruent with the harmony of the heavenly world, Rev. vii. 9—17.

2. *Its pleasing appearance.* Whilst discord and hostility offend the eye, and pain the heart of the thoughtful observer, union, of whatever description, tends to excite the most pleasurable sensations in the breast; but this is more especially the case when tranquillity pervades a religious

society. When materials originally so discordant are brought into a state of delightful harmony, the scene is highly pleasing, and produces admiration, excites lively joy, and elicits sentiments of gratitude. The Psalmist felt the influence of such a scene, and made use of the most odoriferous compound, as a figure by which to describe the effect which was produced upon his mind.

3. *Its beneficial influence.* Union ever tends to augment the happiness of its possessor,—to recommend divine truth to mankind,—to extend the kingdom of Christ in the earth,—and to give strength and stability to the Christian course, Rom. xvi. 19, 20; 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

III. SPECIFY THE MEANS OF ITS PROMOTION. In promoting Christian union there are,

1. *Some things to be avoided.* If we would have peace in our own bosoms, and live in peace with our Christian brethren, we must steadily avoid a spirit of evil surmising, and guard against hard and uncharitable thoughts in reference to our fellow professors, resolutely resisting every inclination to evil speaking and detraction. If we indulge thoughts which are inconsistent with that “charity” which “thinketh no evil,” we shall involve ourselves in condemnation, and be in the way of speaking those words, and performing those actions, which will prove destructive to the union and happiness of the church, Eph. i. 1, 2, iv. 26, 27, 31; James iii. 13—18, iv. 11. In order to preserve Christian harmony,

2. *There are some things to be performed.* As we are regularly dependent upon God for strength and support, it is of the utmost importance that we maintain constant communion with him by fervent prayer; also that we uniformly regulate our conduct and conversation by that infallible directory which infinite wisdom has furnished, making the sacred Scriptures our constant guide at all times; steadily and conscientiously using every means which has a tendency to unite us more closely to our Christian brethren. Finally, above all, let us labour to “grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God,” so shall we be preserved from every evil, and regularly demonstrate, “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

This subject,

1. Excites to close and serious self-examination.

2. Teaches us that discord in religious societies impedes the progress of the gospel.

3. Describes a line of conduct for us in the future part of life.

OMICRON.

LXVII. THE CHILDREN OF ZION SHALL BE JOYFUL IN THEIR KING.

PSALM cxlix. 2.

“Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.”

THE first and purest form of government which the world ever knew, was a theocracy. But in proportion as the minds of men became degraded and sensualized, this got into disrepute; and the *beau ideal* of polity was human monarchy. To have the source of legislation in one of their own species appeared desirable to the thinking part of the community; places of emolument and exaltation presented themselves to the minds of the avaricious and aspiring; while the multitude were allured by a prospect of unbounded licence, and by the hope of pomp and show. Thus were the minds of all prepared to second the designs of any daring adventurer, who might aim at the usurpation of sovereign power. The consequence was, that divine government was soon postponed to human; and from that time to the present, this example has been almost universally followed. Theocracy is no more. There is, however, a freedom and volatility about the human mind, which human laws cannot destroy or even suppress, and hence the great desideratum in jurisprudence is what can perhaps never be known, and certainly never reduced to practice, except by Him who first

'breathed into man a living soul. Of his power in spiritual government, believers are illustrious monuments, as a consideration of our text will serve to prove. The first thesis with which this passage furnishes us is,

I. BELIEVERS ARE "THE CHILDREN OF ZION."

1. *Zion is often used as an emblem of the church of God.* Ps. ii. 6; Isa. xxviii. 16; Rom. ix. 33; 1 Pet. ii. 6. It was stable, Ps. cxxv. 1; so is the church, Matt. xvi. 18. It was secure, Ps. xlviii. 3, 11, 12; so is the church, Eph. v. 29. The situation of Zion was exceedingly beautiful, Ps. xlviii. 2; so is that of the church. It is elevated above the din of the world, and "breathes the spirit of a purer air," Matt. v. 14. Zion was a holy mountain; because on mount Moriah, which joined it on the north-east, the temple of God was built, 2 Chron. iii. 1; Ps. xlviii. 1; the church is holy also, Eph. v. 27. Mount Zion was peculiarly loved by God, Ps. lxxxvii. 2; so is the church, Eph. v. 25.

2. *Believers are children of Zion by birth.* Naturally we are all "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise," Eph. ii. 11, 12. We can obtain no entrance into spiritual Zion except by spiritual birth, John iii. 5, 6. This birth is effected through faith in Christ, by the influence of the Holy Ghost, John x. 9; Rom. v. 1, 2; Eph. ii. 13; Tit. iii. 5, 6. It is frequently preceded by deep anguish, and distressing solicitude, Jer. l. 4, 5; Acts ii. 37, ix. 6, xvi. 29, 30.

3. *Believers can continue children of Zion no longer than while they retain faith,* Heb. x. 38. By the retention of that faith, which first introduced them into Zion, they still continue members of Christ's mystical body. Hence the exhortation of the apostle Paul, Col. ii. 6, 7. They therefore dwell in Zion, knowing that destruction attends their leaving it, John xv. 6. And from the public treasury of Zion they receive their support, they are fed, and clothed, Luke xv. 22; John vi. 35, 51, 53—58.

4. *Zion is often emblematic of heaven,* Heb. xii. 22; Rev. xiv. 1. If the church below be so secure, though still militant, and encompassed by enemies; so lovely, though surrounded by the clouds of sense; and so sacred, though environed by the unclean and polluted; who can describe or even imagine the security, the beauty, and the sanctity

of the church of the first-born in heaven ; around which no night ever closes, on which no cloud ever rests, over which no wind ever blows, and towards which no sin ever approaches ! 1 Cor. ii. 9 ; Rev. xxi. 10—27.

5. *Believers are children of Zion by a title to heaven*, Acts xxvi. 18 ; Eph. i. 18 ; Col. i. 12 ; 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. The title to earthly inheritances is often very obscure and uncertain, and consequently not unfrequently the subject of protracted litigation ; the title of believers to heaven is clear and indisputable, Eph. i. 13, 14. The title to an earthly estate may be cut off. The title of believers to heaven is indefeasible : it is founded upon the promise, nay, upon the oath, of God, Heb. vi. 17, 18 ; and though the grass may wither, and the flower may fade, yet the word of the Lord remaineth for ever. The second thesis presented by our text is,

II. BELIEVERS HAVE A "KING."

1. *Royalty is the centre of supremacy*. A king is a supreme governor. God, in this sense, is the king of believers. The pope is the head of the Romish church. Civil governors are the heads of national churches, but God is the head of his own, the true church ; and consequently, all authority in that church is communicated from Him. Its officers and labourers are of his appointment. To some he grants the commission, "Go ye into all the world," &c., Mark xvi. 15 ; and to others, a more circumscribed commission. How great then is the impiety of those who assume the garment of God's priesthood ; professing the call of the Holy Ghost, without being even the subjects of God's spiritual kingdom !

2. *Royalty is the source of legislation*. God is the legislator of his people. His code is more pure than any ever conceived by the human mind, for the perfection of human jurisprudence, Rom. vii. 12. It does not result contingently from any thing like an arbitrary constitution of the divine will, but necessarily from the purity and wisdom of the divine mind. It does not merely refer to outward conduct, but extends itself to a cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart, Psalm cxix. 96. The revelation of it is clear, nor is an extraordinary extent of intellect necessary for its comprehension, Isa. xxxv. 8 ; for even those parts of it which defy unaided human research, are made known

to man by the teachings of the Spirit, John xiv. 26; 1 Cor. ii. 13. For its requirements, see Matt. 37—39.

3. *Royalty is the fountain of protection.* Probably, the ostensible reason for the appointment of a supreme governor, has been almost universally founded upon this principle. Thus the children of Israel, 1 Sam. viii. 19, 20. Their first reason for demanding a king, was, "that our king may judge us," *i. e.* protect us from the wrongs which may be inflicted by those who live under the same government; their second, "that he may go out before us, and fight our battles," *i. e.* protect us from the ambitious and unjust designs of surrounding nations. In the first of these senses, the protection of God over his subjects is not required, because the kingdom of God is "peace;" but in the second he exercises his royal power, far more completely and effectively than consists with the ability of any human monarch, Job. i. 10; Psalm v. 12, xxvii. 1, xxxvii. 17, 39, lv. 22, cxviii. 8—12, cxlvi. 3—6. The third thesis, which our text presents us, is,

III. BELIEVERS SHOULD BE "JOYFUL IN THEIR KING."

1. *Because he is the most glorious and dignified of all beings.* Consider his nature. He is the independent Jehovah, who was, Psalm xc. 2, xciii. 2; who is, Exod. iii. 14; who shall be, Deut. xxxii. 40; Psalm xlv. 6. He is immutable, Psalm cii. 25—27; Mal. iii. 6; Heb. xiii. 8; James i. 17. He is omnipresent, and omniscient, 1 Kings viii. 27; 2 Chron. ii. 6, vi. 18; Psalm cxxxix. 1—12; Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. He is almighty, Gen. xvii. 1, xxxv. 11; Rev. iv. 8. Consider his moral attributes, his benevolence, Exod. xxxiv. 6; Psalm lxxxvi. 5, cxlv. 8, 9; 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4; James v. 11; 1 John iv. 8. His justice, Deut. xxxii. 4; Psalm lxxxix. 14; Rev. xv. 3. His wisdom, Ps. civ. 24; cxxxvi. 5; Prov. iii. 19; Rom. xi. 33; Col. ii. 3; 1 Tim. i. 17. His truth, Psalm xxv. 10, lxxxvi. 15, c. 5, cviii. 4, cxlvi. 6; Rev. xix. 11. Consider his works, and kingdom of nature, Gen. i. 1, xiv. 19, 22; Deut. x. 14; Psalm cxv. 16; Isa. xxxvii. 16; John i. 3; Acts xvii. 24. Consider his retinue, Psalm lxviii. 17, civ. 4; Heb. i. 6, 14. How closely the honour and joy of a nation is connected with the dignity of their monarch, will be evident without any attempt at illustration.

2. *Because by his charter they enjoy great privileges and*

immunities. Whether any human monarch should be absolute, is a question which does not demand much discussion, as most men are agreed to decide it in the negative ; for on the one hand a monarch is not always solicitous for the advantage of his subjects ; and on the other, if he were, his capacities would not be equal to his wishes. But, the absolute sovereignty of God is justified by his independence, his benevolence, and his wisdom. He gains no advantage from his subjects, he is benevolently disposed toward them, and he knows how to put his designs into execution most advantageously for them ; hence he communicates to them through his Spirit an evidence of their acceptance, Rom. viii. 16 ; and through his word exceeding great and precious promises, 2 Pct. i. 4. They possess peace and joy, Rom. xiv. 17, xv. 13. They have the privilege of rejoicing even in affliction, Rom. v. 3 ; 2 Cor. vi. 10. They enjoy a freedom from condemnation, John iii. 18, v. 24 ; Rom. viii. 1 ; and a well-grounded hope of everlasting enjoyment, Rom. v. 2 ; Col. i. 5, 27 ; Tit. ii. 13, iii. 7 ; Heb. vi. 19. Nor is there any possibility for their charter to be revoked or taken away.

3. *Because the monuments of their great men are protected.* The Bible is a record of the saints. In it are contained monuments of their patience, meekness, courage, faith, and heavenly-mindedness. Here we are taught to admire their virtues, and excited to follow their example, Heb. xi. and vi. 12.

4. *Because their enemies are totally inefficient to disturb his government,* Deut. xxxiii. 26—29 ; Psalm xciii. 1. .

5. *Because his kingdom will ultimately be universal, and all opposing powers be destroyed.* Psalm lxxii. 17, cx. 1 ; Isa. ii. 4, ix. 6, 7, xi. 9, xlv. 23 ; Jer. xxiii. 5 ; Hab. ii. 14 ; Mic. iv. 1—3 ; 1 Cor. xv. 25 ; Rev. xi. 15. Human enemies shall either be subdued by the influences of his grace, or destroyed by the power of his anger ; and diabolical enemies shall be bound in chains of darkness, Rev. xx. 1—3.

“ Come then, and, added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one as radiant as the rest ;
Due to thy last and most effectual work,
Thy word fulfilled, the conquest of a world.”

REMARKS.

1. How great and glorious is the moral elevation of a believer, and how insignificant does the honour of this world appear, contrasted with the dignity of a Christian!

2. How great should be our solicitude to become subjects of the spiritual kingdom of Jehovah!

3. How indefatigable should we be in spreading the knowledge of God, by personal instruction,—by example,—and by the dedication of property, talents, and influence!

Mu.

LXVIII. HOPE IN DEATH.

PROVERBS xiv. 32.

“The righteous hath hope in his death.”

THE most part of this book of Proverbs consists of short independent sentences, spoken by Solomon, the wisest of men, and, as the Jews tell us, in the middle age of his life, when his understanding was in its greatest vigour, and under the inspiration, too, of the Holy Spirit of truth. Coherency of the parts, and dependence of one thing upon another, is not to be expected in a book of aphorisms; for every sentence is to be taken by itself, and includes an entire sense. We come therefore immediately to the words of the text,—“The righteous hath hope in his death.” We shall,

I. ATTEND TO THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS THAT HAVE HOPE IN THEIR DEATH.

II. SPEAK AS TO THE OBJECT OF THEIR HOPE, OR SHEW WHAT THINGS THEY THEN HOPE FOR.

I. ATTEND TO THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS THAT HAVE HOPE IN THEIR DEATH :—"the righteous."

1. On the mention of this character, that passage of the apostle is apt to offer itself to our minds, "There is none righteous, no, not one," Rom. iii. 10. Where then are the righteous persons to be found that have hope in their death? We must consider, that the apostle, in the place quoted, means the legally righteous; none such indeed are to be found on earth; but Solomon here speaks of those that are righteous in a gospel sense, and many such are to be found.

2. *All men are now in a fallen state.* God made the first man perfect, Eccl. vii. 29; after his own image, Gen. i. 27; in integrity or righteousness, which was his honour; but he did not abide in the state in which he was made. The law that was given him to observe he soon transgressed, though furnished with full ability to keep it; and so lost his innocence or legal righteousness, made himself sinful, and brought guilt and moral pollution upon all his natural offspring. So that there are none righteous, so as to be innocent and sinless; not one: all are conceived and born in sin, Ps. li. 5; and so are sinners by nature. And as to practice, "there is not a just," or righteous, "man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not," in a legal sense, Eccl. vii. 20.

3. *Yet every true believer in Christ is righteous, according to the covenant of grace.* Every believer in Christ is in him, and has righteousness imputed to him, 1 Cor. i. 30. It pleased God, on the fall of the first Adam, to set up his Son as a second Adam, that, "as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life:" that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," Rom. v. 18, 19. God hath made Christ, who knew no sin, a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him, 2 Cor. v. 21. This system was the contrivance of infinite wisdom, originated in the free grace of God; is a doctrine that could be only known by divine revelation, in which it is exhibited in the clearest light: "the righteousness of God, by the faith of Jesus Christ,

to all and upon all that believe," Rom. iii. 22. Believers in Christ are justified before God; their guilt is taken away; they are constituted righteous, restored to the Divine favour, enjoy inward peace, and possess a title to heaven.

4. *Believers in Christ have also an inherent righteousness wrought in them by the Holy Spirit.* They are renewed by the Holy Ghost, Tit. iii. 5; and made partakers of a divine nature, 2 Pet. i. 4. Though free justification and entire sanctification are different degrees of a work of grace on the heart, yet the former is preparatory to the latter; and even the former blessing is inseparably connected with the reign of grace within. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace," Rom. vi. 14. All that live in the favour of God are graciously fitted for a life of holiness. They are created in Christ to good works, Eph. ii. 10; and with their new nature they have the Spirit of God put within them, to cause them to walk in his statutes, Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

5. *Believers in Christ are not only habitually righteous by their regeneration, but they endeavour to be actually righteous, in imitation of Christ.* Being united to him, and led by his Spirit, they endeavour to walk as he walked. And the apostle says, "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous," 1 John iii. 7. Being born again, born from heaven, they are in the way of faith and holiness tending thither. They delight in the law of God after the inward man, and endeavour a conformity to it in the whole course of their actions. What God requires they sincerely try to render to him,—the superlative love of their heart, and the impartial and constant obedience of their lives. These now are the righteous persons who have hope in their death.

II. **SHEW THE OBJECT OF THEIR HOPE, OR WHAT THINGS THEY HOPE FOR IN THEIR DYING MOMENTS.** Hope is an expectation of something future and good, which God has promised; and the expectation of it is attended with pleasure and delight, in proportion to their thoughts of its excellency, and to the assurance with which they expect to enjoy it. Accordingly, the Christian's hope is called "the rejoicing of hope," Heb. iii. 6. We shall mention a few things the righteous hope for in their dying moments.

1. *They hope for the gracious presence of God with them in that solemn crisis.* And indeed they never more need his reviving, supporting, and protecting presence, than when called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Their hope of this necessary and important blessing is founded on such promises as these:—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5; "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death," Ps. xlviii. 14; "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever," Ps. lxxiii. 26. It is the consciousness of this gracious presence of God with them in their latter end, that fortifies them against desponding fears, and refreshes their souls with light and comfort, when all other things appear dark and gloomy about them. Hence, David says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," Ps. xxiii. 4. From this promised grace, and powerful presence of God, they hope for safety in their passage from this to the future world.

2. *They hope for the immediate admission of their souls into heaven:* that, having guided them with his counsel during life, He will at death receive their spirits into glory, (Ps. lxxiii. 24,) to dwell in his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore, Ps. xvi. 11; where all evil is excluded, and all good is present, to fill the largest extent of their desires and wishes. The hope of this is founded on several promises: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also," John xiv. 3. Christ in his testament, which is of force and unalterable by his death, appoints to his saints a kingdom, into which being risen, he, as forerunner, is for them entered, with a declared purpose to prepare for their coming, and to keep open the way by his intercession. Hereupon their death comes under his direction and ordering, as having the keys of death and the invisible world. And when he sends death for the souls of believers, they have the like privilege that Stephen had, of committing them into his hand, as ready to receive them, and present them with acceptance to the Father. And thus, being "absent from the body, they are present with the Lord," which is far better, 2 Cor. v.

8; Phil. i. 23; added to the "spirits of just men made perfect," Heb. xii. 23; and so they enter into the joy of their Lord, Matt. xxv. 21.

3. *The righteous, in death, hope for the resurrection of their bodies, in the appointed season, to a glorious immortality.* The hope of this they found on that declaration, "This is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day," John vi. 39. The apostle says, "I have hope towards God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust," Acts xxiv. 15. Though the bodies of believers go down to the grave, they do not lose their relation to Christ, but remain united to him. They sleep in Jesus, and under his eye as guardian of the dust, which, however scattered, is precious and sacred; and them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him, 1 Thess. iv. 14. Christ's resurrection is the pattern and pledge of the resurrection of the bodies of the saints, and will infer it as desirable and blessed. Christ being risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of them that sleep, 1 Cor. xv. 20; and as he rose in glory, they shall in this respect be conformed to him, Phil. iii. 21. All this the righteous die in the hope of, and therefore can freely deposit their flesh in the dark and silent grave, where it shall rest in hope; foreseeing that eventful time, when it shall be raised from thence with unspeakable advantage, every way suited to the noblest operations of the perfected soul, and to all the important uses of the resurrection state.

4. *The righteous in their dying moments have a hope of eternal life, and complete salvation of their entire nature, soul and body, reunited at the resurrection; of all the promised glories of the heavenly state.* Eternal life is the great promise of the gospel. "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life," 1 John ii. 25; and, "in hope of eternal life," Tit. i. 2. All the hopes of Christian believers look towards this, and centre in it. These are some of the chief things the righteous hope for in death.

APPLICATION.

The use that we are to make of this subject is obvious. Let us labour to be righteous persons, in order to our hav-

ing hope in our death ; to have our sins pardoned through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, our souls sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and then to be holy in all manner of conversation. To this end let us beg of God, in the name of Christ, for the Holy Spirit to assist us in the exercise of faith, to renew our nature, and enable us to walk in newness of life. And being on impartial trial that we are real Christians, let us live and die "waiting for the hope of righteousness," as the apostle describes the believers in his day, Gal v. 5.

THETA.

LXIX. THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE JUDGMENT A POWERFUL ANTIDOTE TO DISSIPATION.

ECCLESIASTES xi. 9.

"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes ; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

SUCH was the language of Solomon, king of Israel, who was the wisest of men. He had lived long, and had seen much. He had sought happiness in philosophy, in all the gaieties of life, and the gratifications of sense, and appetite, and passion. And what had he found ? That all was vanity—all incapable of making an immortal spirit happy. He had largely tasted the pleasures of sin, and had proved them defective, because they were transient, and productive of deep remorse. Like the little book in the Apocalypse, in the mouth they were sweet, but in the belly they were bitter. Solomon was well acquainted with human nature ; he knew what it was in youth, for he himself had been young ; he knew with what ardour young people generally pant after pleasure, and how prone they are to desire those pleasures which are forbidden, and which demoralize and destroy the soul, and he was desirous of preserving them from becoming their victims. To accomplish this, he reminds them of a future judgment : "Rejoice, O young

man, in thy youth but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." As though he had said, "Well, young man, you seem bent on your pleasures, you are resolved to have your own way; then take it, but remember you must hereafter be brought to judgment for it." This is a solemn thought, and one in which we are all deeply interested. Let us, remembering that we must be brought to judgment, seriously direct our attention to this subject. Our text teaches us,

I. THAT THERE WILL BE A FUTURE JUDGMENT. The doctrine of a future judgment, though perhaps not discoverable by the unassisted powers of reason, is in perfect accordance with its dictates. It is essential to the perfection of the divine government. The government of God must necessarily be a perfect government: under a perfect government the vicious must be punished, and the virtuous rewarded; but in the present life this is not done. Here we see Nebuchadnezzar on the throne, and Daniel with the lions,—Nero in the palace, and Paul and Silas in the inner prison with their feet fast in the stocks. Here, whilst the proud are called happy, and they that work wickedness are set up, the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, are esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter. But if rewards and punishments be essential to a perfect government, and if the government of God be perfect, as these are not distributed here, they must be hereafter. That which reason renders probable, revelation has made certain, Acts xvii. 31; xxiv. 25.

1. *The time of the judgment is appointed.* At the end of the world, when, strictly speaking, time shall be no more. When all the progeny of Adam shall have had their day of probation. When the gospel shall have been preached in all nations, and the offer of salvation made to every individual. When the redeeming acts of Christ on earth shall all have been accomplished.

2. *Its immediate precursors are described.* The world shall be destroyed by fire, 2 Pet. iii. 7—12; the Lord shall descend from heaven, 1 Thess. iv. 16; he shall come in his own glory, Matt. xxv. 31; and in the glory of the Father, Matt. xvi. 27. And as the processions of judges and princes are rendered more august, and imposing, and impressive, by the solemn tones of music, and a numerous

and splendid retinue, so he will come with all his holy angels. The graves shall be opened, and the dead shall arise. Yes, and we shall all be witnesses of these solemnities; we shall behold the opening graves, the flaming world, and the descending Judge; and shall behold them either with unspeakable joy, or indescribable horror, as our state shall be.

3. *The Judge is named.* The man Christ Jesus. He in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. By whom all things were made, John i. 3; and sustained, Col. i. 17; and governed, Isa. ix. 6; by whom the whole world is redeemed, 1 Tim. ii. 6; who is the only mediator between God and man, ver. 5; the great depository of all grace, John i. 16. He is every way qualified to judge the world, for he exactly knows the character of every individual, therefore cannot be imposed upon; and inflexibly just, and therefore cannot be corrupted.

II. THAT GOD WILL BRING US INTO JUDGMENT. During the period of probation, God treats us as moral agents, and does not ordinarily compel us to any thing. In matters of salvation he commands, entreats, invites, promises, and threatens: but if these fail in producing their proper effect, he never adds physical force.

“Heaven wills our happiness, allows our doom,
Invites us ardently, but not compels.”

But the period of probation once terminated, moral suasion with sinners shall cease for ever. Now it is optional whether they will be saved; but then it shall not be optional whether they will be judged. Now they may or may not approach Christ as a Saviour; then they must and shall approach him as their Judge; for,

1. *All shall be brought into the judgment.* All of every age, from Adam to the last of the human family.—Of every nation, scattered over all the continents and islands of the globe.—Of every tongue, who whilst here were barbarians to each other.—Of every grade of intellect and science, from the rude aborigines of New South Wales to the most enlightened and accomplished of the human race.—Of every shade of character, from the atheist to the Christian, and from the abandoned profligate to the saint perfect in Christ Jesus.—*Some will gladly obey the summons to approach*

the Judge: not because they have never sinned against God;—nor because their sins were either so few, or so trivial, as not to deserve punishment;—nor because their works of righteousness were sufficient to counterbalance their unrighteousness, or make atonement for their sins;—no, but because they had fled to Jesus as their Saviour, and had been pardoned, regenerated, adopted, and sanctified. In the person of their Judge they contemplate their friend, whose appearing they had often anticipated with delight, as that event which should eternalize their union with Christ, and consummate their bliss.—*But others, had they power to resist the authoritative command, would never approach the Judge.* Their sins stare them in the face. On earth they had their good days; health, friends, the bounties of Providence, the blessings of grace; the Bible, the ministry of reconciliation, the secret strivings of the Spirit of God. But all these they abused. Gladly would they be annihilated rather than meet the Judge. But it cannot be avoided, for,

2. *God will bring them into the judgment.* He can do it, for he is omnipotent in power, and therefore can accomplish whatever he pleaseth. Omniscient, and therefore not one of the great family of man can possibly elude his notice. And as he is the God of truth He will do it; for he has spoken the word, and it shall be accomplished.

III. THAT GOD WILL BRING US INTO JUDGMENT FOR ALL THESE THINGS—For walking in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes; by which expressions we are to understand those ways which are prompted from within, or excited from without. The heart being deceitful and desperately wicked, those ways are all bad. It prompts to nothing but evil, and in its unrenewed state is incapable of excitement to any thing else but by a divine power. These ways are numerous; let me mention two.

1. *The way of infidelity.* God's existence is denied. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God:" or if there be a God, He is utterly regardless of the actions of men. Or the Bible is not true, and therefore the preparation it enjoins as essential to future happiness is not necessary. Or if it be necessary, we may safely live in the neglect of it in the season of youth and health, for we may obtain it on a death-bed. Or should we happen to die

without it, God is too good and merciful to punish us everlastingly.

2. *The way of sensuality.* Infidelity removes restraints, and leaves the corrupt heart free to its own actings. Infidelity, in youth, opens the door to every species of licentiousness; for youth is naturally sensual. But for all these things you must be brought into judgment: every thing, every secret abomination, as well as every public action! O what a discovery will then be made!

In conclusion, let me instruct you to place before your minds, especially in seasons of temptation, a future judgment. Its effect will be salutary. It will preserve you from those pleasures only which poison and kill: the contemplation of judgment well comports with the highest religious enjoyments. May you have boldness in that day!

OMEGA.

LXX. JEHOVAH'S DESCRIPTION OF THE MESSIAH.

ISAIAH xlii. 1—4.

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth,” &c.

THE testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The prophets were the harbingers and messengers of Jesus. His Spirit was in them, his name was their glory, and his advent formed the theme of their prophecies. The events they predicted, the messages they bare, and the sermons they preached, were but subordinate parts of their ministry. To prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah, to display the dignity of his person, the benevolence of his character, and the glory of his kingdom, were the principal objects for which they lived and laboured. Isaiah was the most celebrated of these highly favoured men. How many testimonies of Jesus are found in his writings, and how descriptive are those testimonies! That the text relates wholly to Christ, appears no less from its intrinsic character, than from the testimony of Matthew, chap. xii. 18; where he

quotes it almost verbatim, and applies it to a particular circumstance in our Saviour's history. We will, in endeavouring to profit by the text, consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH. He is God's servant, and his elect, &c. "Behold my servant," &c. A servant supposes subordination and inferiority. He who serves is beneath him whom he serves. He may in many respects be his equal, or perhaps his superior; but as his servant, he is beneath him. Jesus Christ thought it no robbery to be equal with God, and he possessed all the fullness of the Godhead; but he took upon him the form of a servant. Here was subordination and inferiority; and though he said, "I and my Father are one;" yet he said, "My Father is greater than I." Should this appear mysterious, so it must remain. Christ was the most mysterious person that ever existed. A servant supposes service or work to be done. Jehovah had work to be done in this part of his dominions,—a violated law to be fulfilled,—an example of consummate perfection to be exhibited,—a revelation of pure unadulterated truth to be made,—an atoning sacrifice to be offered,—hell to be conquered,—and a way opened into the kingdom of heaven for all believers. And this work could be effected by Christ alone. Milton supposed that when the scheme of human redemption was proposed among superior spirits, 'all the heavenly choir stood mute, and silence was in heaven; on man's behalf, patron or intercessor none appeared, much less that durst upon his own head, draw the deadly forfeiture.' But Christ undertook our ransom, and came into the world to work the works of God. A servant supposes subjection. Servants are sometimes placed in circumstances of peril; and risk, and sacrifice, and danger, attend them, in promoting the interests of their masters. But, as servants, they are bound to submit. The work of Christ was the most tremendously awful work that was ever undertaken; but he submitted to the will of God, Matt. xxvi. 39. Christ was God's elect: "Mine elect, in whom my soul," &c. To elect is to choose: Christ was chosen, see Ps. lxxxix. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 4—6. This shews that the act of redemption originated in the Divine will; "God so loved the world that he gave," &c.; that it was free and not necessitated. Man might have been left to perish without

any impeachment of the Divine goodness. But God chose to redeem the world, and he chose his Son to be the agent of human redemption. It also instructs us, that man's salvation is infinitely dear to God. Christ was God's elect, in whom his soul delighted. He was God's "dear Son," and his "beloved Son," who was in the bosom of the Father: and yet he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for all.

II. THE QUALIFICATION OF THE MESSIAH. "I have put my Spirit upon him." God invariably qualifies his servants for their work. And the Spirit of God is the great agent by which all moral good is effected.

1. *God put his Spirit upon Christ as a public recognition of his Messiahship.* When John came preaching in Judea, considerable expectation was excited concerning him. Multitudes flocked to his ministry, and submitted to his baptism; and Jesus also "came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan; and straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him; and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

2. *God put his Spirit upon Christ to fortify him against the attacks of temptation.* He was in all points tempted like unto us. Satan levelled his heaviest artillery, and shot his most fiery darts at the Redeemer; and especially during the forty days that he was in the wilderness; but he was prepared for that attack, "For Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness," &c. Luke iv. 1, 2.

3. *God put his Spirit upon Christ to anoint him for preaching the gospel.* Christ was the great patron of public preaching. "The Spirit of the Lord," said he, "is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor," &c. Luke iv. 18. And when he commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel, he said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

4. *God put his Spirit upon Christ for the purpose of working miracles.* "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you," Matt. xii. 28. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, &c., Acts x. 38.

· III. THE WORK OF THE MESSIAH. "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." This expression may be misunderstood, as the term judgment is differently interpreted.—Punishments are called judgments. Thus God brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, with a strong hand and with great judgments. Judgments are prepared for scorers. Judgment must begin at the house of God. "A fearful looking-for of judgment," &c. But Christ came not to bring punishment, but salvation to the Gentiles. The term judgment signifies that body of holy doctrine which God revealed to the Jews. The precepts, with which the Old Testament abounds, are called God's judgments. How common are such phrases as the following: "These are the judgments which the Lord commanded." "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." "Give the king thy judgments." "I have sworn that I will keep thy righteous judgments."—God's precepts are very properly called his judgments. What is man's judgment but his opinion, or decision, on any given subject? And the Scriptures are God's judgments, his fixed unalterable decisions. But these judgments, laws, and testimonies, were revealed to the Jews only; for it was said concerning them, "He (God) hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments," &c., Ps. cxlvii. 20. But the work of the Messiah was to bring forth judgment, or, as St. Matthew expresses it, "to shew judgment to the Gentiles." And as that body of revealed truth, under the Old Testament dispensation, is called God's judgment, so the doctrine of the gospel, which the Messiah was to bring forth, is designated by the same appellation. Hence, Christ said, "For judgment am I come into this world." No arguments are necessary to prove that Christ hath brought forth judgment to the Gentiles. Are not we Gentiles? Have we not the laws, statutes, and testimonies of God? Christ preached his own gospel, and charged his disciples to "go into all the world," &c.

IV. THE MANNER HOW MESSIAH SHOULD EXECUTE THIS WORK. "He shall not cry," &c.

1. *He shall do it unostentatiously.* He shall not court public patronage. He shall not imitate the princes of this world, who make their entries into cities in regal pomp and

splendour. Nor shall he court the foreign aid of rhetoric, to establish his cause upon earth. Matthew declared concerning him; "Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and charged them they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant," &c. "He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets." Never was there an individual upon earth, who possessed such an opportunity of gaining popular praise as Jesus Christ. In his person he was fairer than the children of men; and by his authority, his preaching, and his miracles, he might have won the world to himself. But he sought not honour from men; when they wished to make him a king, he withdrew himself from them; and when he healed the multitudes, he charged them that they should not make him known. Truth 'needs not the foreign aid of ornament, but is, when unadorned, adorned the most.'

2. *He shall do it tenderly and compassionately.* "A bruised reed shall he not break," &c. The expression, "a bruised reed," &c., may be designed to convey ideas of the compassion of Christ towards penitent sinners. A reed is an emblem of weakness, and a bruised reed is still weaker. How unable is it to support itself! And such is the feebleness of poor broken-hearted sinners, who are crushed to the earth with a load of guilt. He will not extinguish the dimly burning lamp, for so critics say the phrase of "a smoking flax," should be translated; a lamp that has more smoke than light, and that burns dimly for the want of more oil. Christ will not break the one, nor extinguish the other. "He shall bring forth judgment unto truth." This signifies that his gospel, which is designated as judgment, shall triumph over all opposing powers.

3. *He shall do it courageously and fearlessly.* He shall not fail, nor be discouraged. Never were there more discouragements thrown in the way of any undertaking, than the Redeemer met with in working the works of God. That devils should seek to discourage Christ, cannot surprise us, for Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, to curb his influence, and to bruise his head; but that men should seek to discourage Christ, how strange! But he could not be discou-

raged. We are discouraged by the doubtful issue of our undertaking, by the impotency of our powers, and the magnitude of the opposition raised against us; but Christ could not be discouraged on either of these grounds. The isles shall wait for his law, that is, his gospel, which is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. How pleasingly is this Scripture fulfilled in our day!

In conclusion, we call your attention to the mandate of Jehovah.—“Behold my servant;” read of him, study his character, believe in his name. Behold his condescension, his love, his sufferings. Behold him, that you may know him, that you may love, that you may imitate him. Behold him till you are changed into his image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Amen.

BETA.

LXXI. ISRAEL SAVED IN THE LORD.

ISAIAH xlv. 17.

“But Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

THE Old Testament Scriptures are written much in the prophetic strain, and abound in predictions, the accomplishment of most of which is a proof of their divine authority. In this chapter there is a prophecy of the deliverance of the Jews from the seventy years captivity in Babylon, by Cyrus the Mede, who was to be the instrument God would employ in their release; and intimations what he would do for him, to enable him, in reference to that great work. His prophecy concerning Cyrus was given above an hundred years before he was born, and contains many wonderful,

and, humanly speaking, unlikely things of him. For instance, that this truth should be foretold so long before this remarkable event, that he should be identified by name, that he should conquer so potent a monarchy as Babylon, and that, though a heathen, he should favour and restore a religion which his predecessors had attempted to destroy. This prediction of such remarkable events could proceed from God only, to whom all future events are present, even those that are merely contingent, and depend only on his sovereign pleasure, and the will of free agents. To foretell such things is the sole prerogative of the Divine Being, whose understanding is infinite, and he triumphs over idol gods on this account. "Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods," Isa. xli. 22, 23.

Our text contains a promise of "everlasting salvation" to the pious Jews, and is brought forward among the promises of their temporal deliverance from the Babylonish captivity; and is a better, greater, and more lasting,—a salvation that affects the soul, preserving it from endless misery, and securing its everlasting happiness, in and through the Lord Messiah.

I. THE GLORIOUS OBJECT:—Everlasting salvation, in the Lord.

1. *Everlasting salvation* includes a deliverance from ignorance, guilt, depravity, misery, danger; and the possession of light, peace, purity, love, happiness, and security; and this state continued and increased for ever. It is grace consummated in endless glory. For a most animating description of that happy state, read from the 9th verse to the end of the 7th chapter of the Revelation of St. John.

2. This everlasting salvation is *in the Lord*, the Lord Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is emphatically said to be *in him*. It is in him as a possession, purchased by his own blood, in whose right only we can obtain it. It is in him as an inheritance kept in trust, and to be conveyed by him to the appointed heirs of it. It is in him as the grand exemplar, in his human nature, of the complete and final happiness of the saints who are predestinated to be conformed to his

image in holiness and glory, Rom. viii. 29 ; their bodies, at the resurrection, will be changed and fashioned like unto his glorious body, Phil. iii. 21. It is in him both as a beatific object and a perpetual medium, through which the blessed will see and enjoy God for ever.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM EVERLASTING SALVATION IS PROMISED :—Israel.

1. *Israel is a name of great distinction in Scripture.* God himself gave it to the patriarch Jacob, and in very peculiar circumstances. He said to him, “ Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel ;” the reason is added, “ for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed,” Gen. xxxii. 28. He prevailed with God for the blessing, and having obtained that favour, he then prevailed with men. After he was so designated, his posterity bore that name. In the Old Testament they are called the men or children of Israel, Israelites, and frequently Israel ; as we are now called Christians, from Christ. But here we must consider, these were Israelites only by carnal generation : thus all that descended from Jacob were Israelites ; not Israelites in spirit and temper, imitating the faith and treading in the steps of their progenitors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hence, says the apostle, “ They are not all Israel, which are of Israel,” Rom. ix. 6 ; they are not like their father Jacob, who are his seed. All are not Israelites in heart, interested in the blessings of the new covenant, that are Israelites by descent, and in name and profession. Now the Israelites to whom everlasting salvation is promised, are such as are so in a spiritual sense ; and under the name of Israel, in this sense of it, all true believers in Christ are comprehended. But let us attend to a more full description of their character.

2. *True Israelites, or Israelites indeed, as our Saviour called Nathaniel, are such as have given their unfeigned consent to be God’s people ;* such as have been led by divine power cordially to acknowledge his right to them, and their best services ; sincerely to accept of him in Christ, for their God, their portion and supreme felicity, and to surrender themselves to him as their sovereign Lord and rightful owner ; to be his people, subjects, and servants ; and to love him above all, and to live to him and for him,

resolving in his strength to make the doing his will the work of life, and his glory the end of it. In short, they are such as have joined themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten, with enlargement of heart, and full consent to all that is offered and prescribed in the covenant of grace; have renounced all other lords that had dominion over them, and engaged to serve God as his peculiar people.

3. *In consequence of this, true Israelites are such as live in an unreserved subjection to the laws and government of God and the Redeemer.* They “delight in the law of God after the inward man,” Rom. vii. 22; and endeavour after a conformity to it through the whole course of life. Though as justified persons only, they cannot say they have no inward sin, yet they have none but what they hate, and are desirous to be saved from: they have none that reigns in their hearts and has dominion over them: none but what they groan under, and are sincerely engaged in mortifying, and long for the period when they shall be delivered from it. What God requires they resolutely endeavour to render him, such as the superlative love of their heart, and the universal, constant, persevering obedience of life. Through faith in Christ they are vitally united to him, and from him receive those hourly supplies of grace that qualify them for every good word and work. They are such, after all, as, under a sense of their own manifold imperfections, rely on the merits of Christ for everlasting salvation, counting all things but loss, that they may win Christ, and be found in him, in order to their present acceptance with God, as well as at the last great day of account. Such now are true Israelites, to whom everlasting salvation is here promised.

III. THE GROUNDS OF THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR SALVATION.

1. *The possession Christ has taken of it, in the name and nature of all true believers in him*—“Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus,” Heb. vi. 20. And what his design was in ascending into heaven, he told his disciples before he left them: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. And I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also,” John xiv. 2, 3. And what he

said to them, he says to all his true disciples and followers. Having laid down his life on the cross, he rose and ascended into heaven, not only to enter on his own glory, but to take up, and keep possession of the mansions in his Father's house, for his followers, in which they are to live and reign with him for ever.

2. *Christ's intercession, which he ever lives in heaven to make for them.* Which proves, according to the apostle's method of reasoning, that he is able to save to the uttermost, Heb. vii. 25, or εἰς τὸ παντελὲς, to all kinds of perfection, a perfection of parts here, and of degrees hereafter; in fact, with an everlasting salvation, as it is in the text. He pleads the merit of his blood shed on earth in the heavenly sanctuary, that his people may be brought to glory; and he will never give up his suit, till they all who believe in him and follow him be possessed of perfect and everlasting salvation in his presence above.

3. *His mighty power, which is engaged for them.* The apostle says, the heavenly inheritance is kept for them, and they for it, by the power of God, which is almighty,—can never be overcome, and shall never be withdrawn, 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

4. *God's promise.* "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," 1 John v. 11. God's promise is the greatest security that can be given, for he cannot lie, Tit. i. 2. But to prevent or remove the doubts and fears to which his people are subject, he has graciously added his oath to his promise, Heb. vi. 17, 18.

APPLICATION.

1. *How precious should Christ be to believers!* Their obligations to him are deep and everlasting; as his death was the price of their everlasting salvation, of all that grace by which they are made Israelites indeed, and enabled to show themselves such in the course of their lives here, and shall be perfectly and for ever saved at the last.

2. *The Lord's people have good reason to love Christ's appearance.* This is given as their character, 2 Tim. iv. 8; and the reason of it is, because then they are to be saved with an everlasting salvation. He will appear at the end of time, without sin, to their everlasting salvation, Heb. ix. 28.

3. *What an encouragement is what has been said to diligence and perseverance in appointed duty, seeing everlasting salvation will be the consequence of it !* An improvement of the mind, the glorification of the body, an eternity of delight, without any cessation or interruption of it, beyond the present powers of conception or expression, will be the happy result of persevering holiness. "Let us therefore be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor. xv. 58.

THETA.

LXXII. THE UNHAPPY CONDITION OF SINNERS.

ISAIAH lvii. 20, 21.

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

THE inspired writers evince the warmest solicitude for our present as well as for our eternal happiness ; and with a view to both the one and the other, recommend to us that "godliness which is profitable unto all things," &c. 'Tis true that "man is born to trouble," and that "many are the afflictions of the righteous." Yet every reflecting person must perceive, that our happiness or unhappiness so much depends on ourselves, that even the sorrows of adversity may be exasperated, qualified, or sweetened, by our own conduct and reflections. If a man by his own fault or folly has involved himself in trouble, then, with the animadversions of enemies, and the censures of friends, he has to bear the stings of his conscience, and the painful reflection that he has been his own enemy. But if affliction befall him in the order of divine Providence, he may regard

it as the gracious appointment of one who is 'too wise to err; too good to be unkind.' In such case, however, much must depend on the sufferer. Even if he be a pious man, should he so far pore over his miseries as to give place to murmuring or unbelief, he may make his burden intolerable; whereas, if he look upward and onward, he will find reason to rejoice; because "this light affliction," &c. Such are the views given by the prophet in this chapter. He shows that even death itself is a blessing to the righteous, ver. 1, 2. He then proceeds to expose the folly and imprudence of the apostate Jews, ver. 3—12; after which he declares the happy results of hearty humiliation, ver. 15—18; and by way of contrast and of warning, says, "But the wicked," &c. Here we have,

I. A CLASS OF CHARACTERS SPECIFIED. "The wicked." The terms here employed denote such as are deficient in duty, and disorderly in their general conduct. But a reference to particulars contained in this chapter, will show us several things for which they were justly blamed. Instance,

1. *Their vile prostitution of affections, time, and talents: which properly belong to the Lord.*

(1.) He has a right to these, as our author, Isa. lxiii. 16, and lxiv. 8; our preserver, Job vii. 20; Psal. xxxvi. 6; our benefactor, Psal. civ. 10—28.

(2.) He is worthy of these. Such are his dignity and excellence, that his service confers honour on the noblest of his creatures, Psal. viii. 1, and ciii. 4—6; Rev. iv. 11.

(3.) He claims these things, Deut. vi. 5—13; yet,

(4.) He justly complains of misapplication and abuse, Isa. i. 4. This misconduct is represented as a violation of filial obligations, chap. i. 2; and of conjugal obligations, chap. lvii. 7—9. "Thou didst debase thyself even unto hell." The counterpart of this idolatrous devotion and dependence is to be found, now, in an inordinate attachment to, and reliance on, any part of animate or inanimate creation. Such the apostolic decision, Col. iii. 5. And hence the apostolic caution, 1 John ii. 15, 16.

2. *Their insolent contempt of God's authority and commands* is another ground of complaint. "Against whom do ye sport yourselves?" ver. 3, 4. Such, in the present day, is the impious conduct of the sons of folly, riot, and blasphemy; who resent reproof, ridicule piety, and seem to

claim the right of indulging their irascible or lascivious passions, and of hectoring, lying, sabbath-breaking, &c. without control. There may be comparatively few who merit censure so severe. But there are many who resemble the wicked of whom the prophet speaks, in,

3. *Their neglect or rejection of God's gracious overtures.* 'Tis great condescension in him to care about man at all. More so to make overtures to rebels with a view to their benefit. He had saved and blessed Israel, and had declared himself willing still to do them good, ver. 19; but they had sought other gods, and forsaken him, ver. 5. When "wearied" in their unprofitable toil, they still persevered, ver. 10; and amidst the corrections and entreaties of heaven they remained the reverse of the humble penitent mentioned ver. 15. To us also have overtures been made by God, through his word, his Son, his ministers, Isa. lv. 6, 7; Acts iii. 26; 2 Cor. v. 20. And yet, of many, the Redeemer says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Is this our case? If so, we should hear,

II. GOD'S DECLARATION RESPECTING SUCH CHARACTERS. "There is no peace—they are like the troubled sea," &c. This assertion is a very comprehensive one, and furnishes occasion for a great variety of remarks. We may regard it as being,

1. *A simple declaration of a matter of fact.* In this view, the text represents the state of the wicked as an unnatural state of constraint and disorder, "like the troubled sea." The natural state of water is that of quiescence and placidity; every particle resting in its proper place. In man's primitive condition all was order and harmony. Yet the sea is liable to agitation: so was man; and in fact he has been disturbed by an evil influence; so that his principles, affections, proceedings, are so disordered, that God, who fully knows his case, declares, "There is no peace." This should undeceive those who lay the blame of their uneasiness on their particular circumstances; and who vainly suppose, that were they in the condition of such and such wicked men, they should be happy. Unerring wisdom pronounces against this supposition. Wickedness and wretchedness are inseparable. Peace is the opposite of derangement and disquiet; but "there is no peace to the wicked," &c. For this is,

2. *A philosophical declaration of the natural effects of wickedness.* "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest." Though the sea requires an exciting cause to set it in motion, yet it may remain troubled long after the gale is past. Hour after hour, and day after day, the action and re-action of its waves are seen. It rolls its billows to the shore, and "casts up mire and dirt." So, in the unrenewed mind, the action and re-action of love, and desire of possession, jealousy of a rival, envy of his excellence, hatred of his person, leading perhaps to malice and revenge, and fear of consequences, keep up the tumult that has been produced. Opposing parties, also, whether in church or state, may illustrate this remark. But exciting causes abound almost every where: and hence the trouble is renewed, and prolonged or perpetuated. And this is a state not less of disgrace than of disorder. Nothing can be more agreeable than the clear and the calm sea, reflecting the fruitful earth, the azure sky, &c., and giving you another world in all its grandeur, and in all its beauty. But when the tempest has lashed it into rage, and roused its sediment, nothing but vileness and filth appear, and its beauteous face is perverted into deformity and desolation. Fit emblem this of the sinner's state. In the ale-house, the revel, the horse-race, the boxing-ring, they are like "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame," Jude 13. Peace is the opposite of anxiety, distraction, and tumultuous passion. But "there is no peace to the wicked," &c. This is,

3. *A judicial declaration of God's displeasure at sin;* and shews the state of the wicked to be one of extreme peril, as one of disorder and disgrace. Peace is opposed to hostility; but "God is angry with the wicked every day," *Psa. vii. 11—13.* See his danger further expressed, *Psa. xi. 6; Isa. xxviii. 14—18.* There is no peace, no amity, now, or at any time of life, or at death, *Prov. xiv. 32;* or at judgment, *Luke xix. 27;* or for ever, *Rev. xiv. 11.* Therefore prudence requires us to renounce at once this obnoxious character, both as to company, *Prov. xiii. 20; 1 Cor. xv. 33;* and to practice, *Num. xxxii. 23.* Then the peace denied to the wicked may be ours. In order to which we should consider by whom this peace is granted, *ver. 19;* and by what mediation it is procured, *1 Tim. ii. 5; Col. i. 19—22;*

and should sue for it humbly and heartily, Isa. lvii. 15 ; with promptitude and confidence, Job xxii. 21 ; Isa. xxvii. 5.

ZETA.

LXXIII. THE VISION OF THE HOLY WATERS.

EZEKIEL xlvii. 9.

“And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”

VARIOUS were the methods by which the Almighty originally communicated his word to mankind. But whatever were the “divers manners” in which he “spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets,” we should always remember, that they only “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” In this chapter the Lord spake to Ezekiel by a vision, which was frequently the case with many of the inspired prophets. This vision took place during the Babylonish captivity, when “the hand of the Lord was upon his servant the prophet, and brought him into the land of Israel.” There he was led by “a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass,” to the temple at Jerusalem; where, “in the visions of God,” he beheld “the waters” issuing from “the sanctuary,” and spreading life, health, and fertility wherever they came. “And it shall come to pass,” &c. In this interesting portion of divine truth we shall be led to observe, The river it specifies,—the blessings it describes,—and the instructions it suggests.

I. THE RIVER THE TEXT SPECIFIES. In the prophet’s vision of this “river,” three things are stated, which demand our particular attention:—

1. *The source from whence it issues.* It is generally agreed that this river metaphorically represents the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem, and spread

into all the surrounding countries ; and being accompanied with the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, it produces the most glorious effects in the salvation of sinners, Acts ii. 41. These waters “ issued out from under the threshold of the house ” of the Lord, and “ came down from under the right side of the house ; ” signifying, that “ from Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” There the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles in his miraculous gifts, that they might publish “ good tidings of great joy unto all people.” In the temple they were first to “ preach the words of this life,” and begin their commission “ at Jerusalem,” Luke xxiv. 47. Thus the glorious gospel of Christ, which originally “ proceedeth out of the throne of God and the Lamb,” in the plenitude of its dispensation, issued forth from Zion, “ the mountain of the Lord’s house.”

2. *The direction in which it flows.* “ These waters issue out toward the east, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea.” This was accomplished when the apostles were scattered abroad “ throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria : ” and the word of the Lord “ mightily grew and prevailed,” Acts vi. 7. It visited and blessed “ the isles of the sea,” and its sound went forth “ to the end of the world.” It still rolls on from continent to continent, and from one kingdom to another ; and will continue to “ win its widening way, to earth’s remotest bounds,” Rev. xiv. 6. Like a mighty river, it will bear down all opposition, and ultimately fill and deluge the world with the glory of God, Isa. xl. 4, 5.

3. *The plenitude with which it abounds.* It is not a wasting brook, that soon exhausts its stores ; but an abounding river, spreading its streams in every direction, which are perpetually flowing from an inexhaustible fountain. The river of gospel grace is replete with blessings the most rich, free, and abundant. It is “ full of grace and truth,” John i. 14. The prophet says, “ It was a river that I could not pass over ; for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over,” ver. 5. The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, is boundless ; ‘ Its streams the whole creation reach, so plenteous is the store.’ Its benefits are adequate to our most enlarged necessities ; and all are invited to participate its treasures, “ without

money and without price," Isa. lv. 1; John vii. 37, 38. Let us then consider,

II. THE BLESSINGS THE TEXT DESCRIBES. "And it shall come to pass," &c. The peculiar properties of this river distinctly point out the blessed effects of the gospel, in them that hear and keep it.

1. *The gospel is healing in its virtue.* "Because these waters shall come thither, they shall be healed," &c. Mankind are morally diseased and perishing. Our spiritual maladies are natural, inveterate, and destructive, Isa. i. 5, 6. But God has mercifully provided an infallible remedy for the moral plague of the human heart: "There is a balm in Gilead, and a physician there." Jesus possesses sufficient virtue to heal every malady of the soul, Luke vi. 19. The efficacy of the gospel is eminently displayed in counteracting the baneful influence of sin and Satan, and restoring the believer to spiritual health and soundness, Acts xxvi. 18. Whoever receives it, is healed by its saving virtue, and shall live for ever.

2. *The gospel is abundant in its success.* "And there shall be a great multitude of fish." Though many reject divine truth, it is not preached in vain. Some believe its report, and to them "the arm of the Lord is revealed." Many have been caught in the gospel net, and become followers of the Lord, 1 Thess. i. 5, 6. The captivating attractions of the Redeemer's cross have, in all ages, drawn and subdued "a great multitude" to the sceptre of righteousness. Wherever the gospel is preached in its purity, it will be attended with some degree of success. It had free course, and was glorified among the primitive Christians; and still, not a few are "daily added unto the Lord," Acts xvii. 11, 12. Many believe its truth, participate its renovating power, and rejoice in its saving benefits.

3. *The gospel is quickening in its power.* "And every thing shall live whither the river cometh." It is living water, continually emanating from "the fountain of light and life." Wherever it flows it spreads life and peace, and every blessing. It replenishes the waste places of the earth, and makes the moral wilderness to "rejoice and blossom as the rose," and flourish like the garden of the Lord, Isa. xxxv. 1, 2. It banishes misery and death, and

guides our feet into the way of righteousness and peace. It quickens those who were "dead in trespasses and sins," and inspires them with spiritual and eternal life in the Lord, John v. 24, 25. When it is "received in the Holy Ghost," it becomes spirit and life unto the soul, and "springs up into everlasting life," John iv. 14. We shall now endeavour to ascertain,

III. THE INSTRUCTIONS THE TEXT SUGGESTS. It should deeply impress our minds with the following reflections:—

1. *The duty of gratitude for gospel privileges.* "Blessed are our ears, for they hear what prophets and righteous men desired to hear; but they heard them not." Through the medium of promises, types, and visions, they joyfully anticipated the approaching kingdom of the Messiah. But the veil is now removed, and we live happily under a more glorious dispensation, John i. 17; 2 Cor. iii. 11. The gospel has visited the land of our birth, and its ministers stand on the banks of its rivers, devoutly exclaiming, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," &c., Rev. xxii. 17. Surely, "blessed is the people that know the joyful sound," Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16.

2. *The necessity of embracing gospel blessings.* It is not the mere hearing of the gospel that will save us. We must not be "hearers only, deceiving ourselves, but doers of the word," James i. 22—25. Let us attentively consider the salutary instructions of the parable of the sower and the seed, Matt. xiii. 18—23. We must receive the gospel in all its promised benefits, and practically adorn and exemplify its hallowing truths. The rejection of it will highly aggravate the guilt, and augment the punishment of the impenitent, John iii. 19; 2 Thess. i. 7—9. "Take heed therefore how ye hear; for how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

3. *The blessedness of enjoying gospel salvation.* To those who believe, the gospel of Christ is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God," Rom. i. 16. To them Jesus is precious, and they glory in his cross. They drink of "the water of life freely;" and rejoice in its healing, quickening, cleansing, and cheering virtue, Ps. xlv. 4. They are also deeply concerned for the salvation of mankind. They sincerely pity heathen lands, and earnestly pray that the kingdom of God may speedily come, to every nation, kindred,

tongue, and people. They are truly blessed on earth, and will finally be led to "living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

ETA.

LXXIV. KNOWLEDGE INCREASED BY MANY RUNNING TO AND FRO.

DANIEL xii. 4.

"Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

WHATSOEVER things were written aforetime, were written for our learning. We have every thing to learn, but the Bible is a book of knowledge. The instruction with which it abounds is of two kinds; history, and prophecy: the one describes the past, the other unfolds the future. The principal parts of the Old Testament are historical records; but Daniel, from whose writings the text is selected, instructs us, not only by a substantial and interesting detail of facts which transpired in his day, but by a prophetic anticipation of what will happen in future ages, and to generations then unborn. The text is preceded by a very abstruse part of sacred prophecy; "And at that time shall Michael stand up," &c., ver. 1—4. With the opinions of commentators as to the signification of these verses, we have at present nothing to do; the text is generally regarded as having a special reference to gospel days, and to the period of the world in which we have the happiness to live. Two things claim our attention:

I. AN END TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. "Knowledge shall be increased:"

II. MEANS USED FOR ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT. "Many shall run to and fro."

I. AN END TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. "Knowledge shall be increased." If we cast our eyes upon the prophetic parts of divine revelation, we shall find that they describe a

happier state of the world than has ever yet been witnessed; and this shall be introduced by an increase of knowledge.

1. Observation. *The faculty which man has for acquiring knowledge, forms the most obvious distinction of our species.* 'Brutes soon their zenith reach; their little all flows in at once; in ages they no more could know, or do, or covet, or enjoy. Were man to live coeval with the sun, the patriarch pupil would be learning still; yet dying, leave his lesson half unlearnt.'

2. Observation. *It is to the credit of the Christian religion that it is founded in knowledge.* Its doctrines cannot be credited, nor its duties performed, nor its privileges enjoyed, without knowledge. The church of Rome is friendly to ignorance; its ministers take away the key of knowledge. Ignorance and vice generally go together, and the throne of the devil is supported by ignorance. "He blinds the minds of them that believe not." The extreme profligacy and misery so prevalent in many parts of our country, among the lower classes, are chiefly to be attributed to their ignorance. Some have entertained an apprehension, that if the poor possessed more knowledge, they would be unfitted for the duties of their station; but let us examine facts. Who are most disposed to outrage and violence? Who are the persons that disturb the peace of the neighbourhood in which they live, and compose mobs, and form popular insurrections? Are they those who have attained the greatest share of knowledge, whose minds are most enlarged, and who form the most clear and comprehensive ideas of their duty? No, they are generally the most ignorant part of the community, who neither fear God, nor regard man.

3. Observation. *The knowledge of God shall be increased.* How much ignorance of God is there in the world at present! Whole nations are not only destitute of any saving acquaintance with God, but ignorant even of his existence. —The knowledge of God will increase. Scriptural knowledge. God is partially known by his works, but fully described in his word. Experimental knowledge. There is an amazing difference between that knowledge which is gained by mere study, and that which results from experience; the one affects the judgment, and the other

transforms the heart; the one is human, and the other divine. God promised his ancient people, "I will give them a heart to know me," &c., Jer. xxiv. 7. This knowledge will be influential. It will produce the happiest effects. Personally, it will lead us to love God, 1 John iv. 8. It will produce confidence in him, Psalm ix. 10. It will produce obedience to him, 1 John ii. 3, 4. Relatively, it will produce brotherly love, 1 John iv. 20, 21. It will extinguish the torch of civil discord: "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established," &c., Isa. ii. 2—4. It will also be an effectual antidote against religious bigotry. Men may not be of one opinion, but they will be of one heart. "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart," &c., Isa. xi. 13. This knowledge shall increase, until it becomes general, if not universal: "All flesh shall know, that I the Lord am thy Saviour," &c., Isa. xlix. 26; Jer. xxxi. 33, 34; Hab. ii. 14.

4. Observation. *The knowledge of God will lead to the acquisition of useful knowledge of every kind.* Religion enlarges the mind, illuminates the understanding, rectifies the judgment, and teaches men to think more clearly and more comprehensively on subjects of general science. The progression of knowledge has been constant in every country where religion has prevailed; and it is the Christian religion, 'which, rising upon us like a finer sun, has quickened moral vegetation, and replenished Europe with talents, virtues, and exploits, which, in spite of its physical disadvantages, have rendered it a paradise, the delight and wonder of the world.'

II. MEANS USED FOR ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT. "Many shall run to and fro." God works by agents, and instruments. In dispensing his truth, he employs human agents—patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, apostles, and ministers of different descriptions. In reference to the instruments adverted to in the text, we notice their number, "many;" their prompt activity, they "run;" the sphere of their operation, "to and fro."

1. *The number of gospel ministers.* "They shall be many." In some periods of the world, the advocates of truth have been reduced to a very small number. Elijah once complained, "I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." Christ sent forth twelve disciples, and

afterwards seventy, two and two, before his face, into every city and place whither he himself would come. Now Christ has many ministers among different denominations of professing Christians. Many in the Establishment, many among Dissenters. Many settled over congregations, and many itinerants; and their talents are almost as diversified as their persons: some are sons of thunder, others sons of consolation: some, like Paul, are sent for the defence of the gospel; others, like Apollos, are eloquent men, mighty in the Scriptures. Some are endowed with science, and literature, and every human and divine accomplishment; others have nothing to recommend them, but a knowledge of the truth, and a zealous desire to propagate it.

2. *The prompt activity of ministers.* "They run to and fro." Preaching is figured to us as running. See Psalm cxlvii. 15; Gal. ii. 2; Phil. ii. 16; 2 Thess. iii. 1. The dignity of the Being who employs the ministers of the gospel, should induce them to prompt activity. They are God's ambassadors, they are employed by "the King of kings." The importance of the message they bear. They negotiate for a peace between God and man; they carry tidings of pardon to the guilty, &c.; and, above all, the sinner's danger urges them to run, "to seek and to save" him. If a house were on fire, and the inhabitants liable to perish in the flames, who would not run to their rescue? This running imports diligence; diligence in getting as well as diffusing good. The apostles, who had extraordinary helps from heaven, dared not neglect the ordinary means of acquiring information. Paul exhorted Timothy to give attendance to reading, &c., 1 Tim. iv. 13. The mind of a minister is naturally as devoid of good, as that of another man; hence, he should be diligent in reading, studying, praying, &c. He should be diligent also in doing good, "being instant in season, and out of season," &c. This running also imports fidelity, in giving to every man his portion of meat in due season. The office of ministers is fraught with awful responsibility, Ezek. xxxiii. 5, 6; they must therefore be faithful.

3. *The sphere of ministers' operation.* They "run to and fro." The sphere of ministerial duty is the world; according to Christ's original commission, "Go ye into all the

world," &c. And the gospel is to be preached in all the world, as a witness unto all nations; and whatsoever local situations some may be called to occupy, others are most unquestionably called to "run to and fro," to carry the gospel into other lands, and preach it where Christ has never been named. And never were there so many efforts made to increase knowledge, by missionary exertions, as in the present day. May those efforts be crowned with the blessing of Jehovah, "until the whole earth be filled with his glory!"

INFERENCES.

1. The great end of public preaching is to increase knowledge; the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Inquire, have you this knowledge?

2. How careful and diligent should ministers be in acquiring knowledge! Ignorant ministers are "blind leaders of the blind." No man can teach what he does not know. Blind men never lecture on colours, nor deaf men on sounds.

3. If ministers must run to and fro to increase knowledge, Christians are bound to help them, 3 John 8. Ministers are men of like passions with others, and cannot live by miracle; for they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

BETA.

LXXV. THE VOICE OF THE ROD.

MICAH vi. 9.

"Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."

IN this chapter we find our prophet,

1. *Proclaiming God's controversy with Israel.* In doing this—He represents God as sitting in judgment on Israel—

Summoning the whole creation to witness the equity of his procedure in his judicial capacity, ver. 1, 2.—Appealing to the Israelites themselves in proof of his former kindnesses towards them, ver. 3—5. Specifying the crimes with which they were chargeable, namely, scandalous injustice, and abominable idolatries, ver. 10, 12, 16.—And threatening to punish them with desolating judgments, ver. 13—15. Having thus proclaimed God's controversy, we find our prophet,

2. *Shewing Israel how their impending destruction might be averted.* In communicating this instruction, he supposes a penitent Israelite manifesting his concern for salvation, by instituting the most important inquiries, and expressing his readiness to comply with whatsoever God might be pleased to demand, ver. 6, 7. These inquiries Micah answers, by intimating, that to obtain God's favour we must come to him, not according to the devices of superstition, but as he prescribes in his word; and observing, that to please God in future, we must live in the uniform practice of justice, mercy, and humble piety. "He hath shewed thee, O man," &c., ver. 8. This call to holy obedience is enforced in our text, by the consideration of their present chastisements, "The Lord's voice," &c. That by the rod is meant certain calamities sent for the purposes of punishing and reforming the sinful Israelites, there can be no doubt, (see Ps. lxxxix. 30—32,) as we are required in our text to "hear the rod," &c. This teaches us,

I. THAT THE ADVERSITIES OF MANKIND "ARE APPOINTED BY GOD."

1. *The afflictions of mankind are various.* Some affect their *bodies*; as pain, sickness, and weakness.—Some affect their *minds*; as natural depression of spirits, and the impairment of their mental faculties.—Some affect their *circumstances*; as losses, and disappointments.—Some affect their domestic *connexions*; as bereavements, &c.—Some affect their country in general; as war, famine, pestilence, &c.

2. *They are all subject to the appointment of God.* They could not exist without him; without either his established constitution of things, or his infliction, or his permission, Matt. x. 29.—He adjusts all their circumstances; he selects

them with respect to their nature, regulates their measure, and limits their duration, Isa. xxvii. 8.—*Their appointment by him is evident*; from the subjection of all agents to his authority, whether those agents are benevolent, or malevolent, or inanimate, Dan. iv. 35; Ps. cxix. 90, 91; and from the declarations of his word, Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 6.

3. *They are appointed by God, for important purposes.* They should not therefore be disregarded, as if they came by chance, and without design, Job v. 6; nor despised, as if they were incapable of any profitable improvement, Heb. xii. 5. Hence, our text leads us to observe,

II. THAT ADVERSITY IS THE INSTRUMENT OF GOD'S FATHERLY CORRECTION. He here calls it a rod, because, like a rod,

1. *He employs it reluctantly*, Lam. iii. 32, 33; Isa. xxviii. 21.

2. *He employs it for man's benefit*, Heb. xii. 10.—To bring us as sinners to repentance, Rev. iii. 19; Ps. cxix. 67.—To drive iniquity from our hearts. Compare Prov. xxii. 15, with Isa. xxvii. 9.—To restrain us from destructive wanderings, Hos. ii. 6, 7.—To improve our holiness, Heb. xii. 10, 11; Rom. v. 3, 4.—And to augment our future glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17.

3. *He employs it only when necessary*, 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. That we may concur in promoting God's gracious designs, let us observe,

III. THAT GOD SPEAKS BY THE ROD TO THOSE WHOM HE CHASTENS. He speaks,

1. *With a reproving voice*; pointing out our faults, by our corrections. Thus the barbarity of Adonibezek was specified by his sufferings, Judges i. 6, 7.—The cruelties of Agag, by his execution, 1 Sam. xv. 33.—The crimes of David, by his domestic calamities, 2 Sam. xii. 9—12. The pride of Nebuchadnezzar, by his deep abasement, Dan. iv. 30—32.—And the wilful waste of the prodigal son, by his woeful want, Luke xv. 13, 14. God speaks by the rod,

2. *With a warning voice*; shewing the impenitent their danger. This is evident from God's threatenings by Moses, Lev. xxvi. 14—39. And by Amos iv. 6—12. God also speaks by the rod,

3. *With an encouraging voice*; assuring us that there is

yet hope concerning us. As wise and kind earthly parents chasten their children while there is hope, (Prov. xix. 18,) so while God chastens us, we have still reason to hope that our afflictions, if duly improved, will be succeeded by eternal happiness, Job xxxiii. 27, 28. But as this happy issue of our afflictions so depends on our proper deportment under them, we should observe also from our text,

IV. THAT THE INSTRUCTION CONVEYED BY THE ROD CLAIMS OUR ATTENTION. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." These injunctions evidently require us to hear the rod of God's fatherly correction,

1. *With pious attention*; ever seeing and acknowledging the hand of God in our afflictions, we must hear, not only the rod itself, but him also that appointed it. We should acknowledge God's hand in every adverse dispensation, as David did, with careful abstinence from rebellious murmuring, Psal. xxxix. 9; as Eli did, with calm resignation to God's will, 1 Sam. iii. 18; as Job did, with thankfulness to God for past favours, Job i. 21.

2. *With inquisitive attention*; seriously desiring to learn all that the rod is designed to teach, faithfully examining ourselves in the language of Eliphaz, (Job xv. 11,) and earnestly praying to God with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me," Job x. 2.

3. *With candid attention*; sincerely ready to admit conviction, and to renounce all detected evils, Job xxxiv. 31, 32.

4. *With practical attention*; promptly forsaking every censured evil, Lam. iii. 39—41; earnestly deprecating threatened destruction, Psal. vi. 1—4; and importunately seeking forfeited favours, 2 Chron. vi. 24—27. Thus let the corrected rebel return to him that smiteth him; let the chastened wanderer return to her former husband; and let all the afflicted humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. Then, when they are tried, they shall come forth like gold—testifying, even in this life, "We know, O God, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted us," and prepared to sing in a better world,—

"God of our lives, how good, how wise,
Thy judgments on our souls have been !

They were but blessings in disguise,
 The painful remedies of sin ;
 How different now thy ways appear,
 Most merciful, when most severe !”

Therefore blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O
 Lord, and teachest him out of thy law.

ALPHA.

LXXVI. THE BROAD AND THE NARROW WAY.

MATT. VII. 13, 14.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate ; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat ; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

THESE are the words of him who “spake as never man spake.” As a divine prophet, Jesus was infallible, and his word was with power. Though many of the Jews despised him as an impostor, others “were astonished at his doctrine,” and said, “he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” This honourable testimony is an important fact, and is fully confirmed by the sacred records of the inspired evangelists : they faithfully preserve the substance of many of Christ’s discourses, which are highly instructive and profitable to mankind. The passage selected for our present consideration, is a part of his celebrated sermon on the mount. Having dwelt largely on some of the leading truths of religion, in the text he exhorts his hearers to renounce the service of sin and Satan, and press into the way of righteousness and peace, as the only method of escaping eternal ruin ;—“Enter ye in at the

strait gate," &c. These impressive words distinctly describe the broad way of sin and death,—the narrow path of life and peace,—and the duty and interest of mankind.

I. THE BROAD WAY OF SIN AND DEATH. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way," &c. The practice of sin is here compared to the entrance and pursuit of an open and extensive way, which, though "it seemeth right unto a man, the end thereof are the ways of death." The specified properties of this way are lamentably true in every age and place, and are highly dishonourable to such as walk according to the course of this world.

1. *Sin is alluring in its character.* It is called a wide gate, and a broad way, because it is in perfect accordance with the corrupt dispositions of the heart, and with all the evil propensities of human nature. It presents innumerable fascinating allurements to every class of sinners, and invariably flatters and suits every vile principle and passion of "the carnal mind." The "broad way" of ungodliness gives full scope for the indulgence and practice of all the deluding "pleasures of sin for a season." But all the diversified allurements of impiety are full of deadly poison, and mortally "war against the soul," Jer. ii. 19.

2. *Sin is prevalent in its dominion.* "Many there be that go in thereat." All men naturally enter in at the "wide gate," and practically pursue the "broad way" of sin and ruin, Ps. li. 5; lviii. 3. Sinners of every description crowd the deceitful paths of folly and dissipation. Many have always travelled the downward road of death, under the treacherous influences of the world and Satan; and still it is thronged with thoughtless, deluded, and impenitent travellers, Rom. iii. 12—16. Not only many openly profane transgressors, but also many hypocritical formalists, are found pursuing the dreadful career of misery and perdition, for "the end of those things is death," Matt. vii. 22, 23.

3. *Sin is destructive in its influence.* It "leadeth to destruction." This is the natural result, and unavoidable tendency of every transgression. "The wages of sin is death, even everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." Sin destroys all present purity and peace, and will finally destroy both body and soul in hell for ever, Ps. ix. 17. It leadeth, as the direct, manifest, and certain

way, to complete, inconceivable, and endless destruction. It has led many there already, and it is now leading myriads more to "the bottomless pit," Matt. xxv. 41.—O consider your latter end, and escape for your life! Abandon the unhallowed course of folly and crime, and diligently pursue,

II. THE NARROW PATH OF LIFE AND PEACE. "Strait is the gate," &c. In this instructive description of the way of holiness, or of practical religion, we may learn,

1. *The purity of its nature.* It is the strait gate of repentance and conversion, and the narrow way of faith and holiness. It is difficult to enter and pursue, because of the corruptions of the heart, the temptations of Satan, and the snares of the world, Luke xviii. 23, 24.—All sin must be renounced, the heart must be changed, and the life become holy and useful, Tit. ii. 12. Religion requires constant self-denial—the crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts—watchfulness and prayer—and the endurance of hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, Matt. xvi. 24; Eph. vi. 11, 12.—This way is strait and narrow, and will admit of nothing vain, unjust, or impure, Isa. xxxv. 8.

2. *The paucity of its subjects.* "And few there be that find it." Some despise and reject it altogether, and others have a name to live and are dead, Matt. vii. 21. The truly pious and faithful travellers to Zion are but few, or a "little flock," compared with the many that walk in the "broad way," and "follow the multitude to do evil." Though iniquity abounds, the Lord has always had a seed to serve him, who have known his name, and obeyed his truth. He has still a few eminently holy, humble, and obedient servants, who gladly walk in the "narrow way, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

3. *The tendency of its influence.* "It leadeth unto life." As sin brought death and misery, Christ brings life and salvation. He came that we might have life through his name, 1 John iv. 9. A personal interest in his merits through faith, secures an inward and spiritual life of grace, and leads to a blissful immortality, and eternal life beyond the grave, 1 John v. 11. In the "narrow way of righteousness is life; and in the path-way thereof there is no death." It infallibly leads from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to holiness,

and from this vale of tears, to the kingdom of heaven, Isa. xxxv. 10. What a glorious way, and how highly honoured are its travellers ! Though it is strait and narrow, it secures every possible advantage, and essentially involves,

III. THE DUTY AND INTEREST OF MANKIND. "Enter ye in at the strait gate," &c. The Saviour clearly describes in the text the two opposite ways of sin and holiness, with the different ends to which they lead ; and exhorts us to forsake the former and pursue the latter. This exhortation implies,

1. *The difficulty of seeking salvation.* The straitness of the gate, and the narrowness of the way to heaven, render it difficult both to enter and to walk in. This is manifestly the doctrine of Scripture, and is fully confirmed by experience. The opposition with which we have to contend is powerful and incessant. The evil world, our carnal nature, and the prince of darkness, are combined and indefatigable enemies of the soul, and oppose our pursuit of eternal life, Matt. xiii. 22 ; 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. Salvation, however, is not impossible ; yet many things contribute to the difficulty of its attainment, Luke xviii. 26, 27.

2. *The necessity of personal exertion.* Though salvation is not of works, but by faith, it must be faithfully sought, in order to be found. And hence we are exhorted to use the various means of Divine appointment, to obtain his blessings, Phil. ii. 12, 13.—We must "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," and strive to enter in at the strait gate. We must strive with God in faith and prayer, against all enemies and opposition ; and in every duty and ordinance of the gospel, Matt. xi. 12. We must be prompt and decided, and not only inquire, but actually "enter in at the strait gate," and continually walk in the "narrow way," to the heavenly Canaan.

3. *The importance of pursuing religion.* The text sets life and death before us, and urges our immediate choice of the way of truth. This is both our imperious duty and highest interest, and is vitally connected with our present and eternal happiness. Let us then cheerfully obey the voice of the Redeemer, and no longer neglect our salvation ; but instantly "enter in at the strait gate," and pursue "the way everlasting." Let us fully come out from the way of the wicked, and "join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant," Jer. l. 4, 5.

We may conclude,

1. *By serious inquiry.* In what way are we now walking?
2. *By solemn warning.* "The way of the ungodly shall perish."
3. *By consoling advice.* Let Christians be thankful and diligent.

ETA.

LXXVII. INSTRUCTION SUGGESTED BY THE PAYMENT OF TRIBUTE MONEY.

MATTHEW XVII. 24—27.

"And when they were come," &c.

THE tribute here spoken of, is supposed to have been the half-shekel, in value about fifteen pence of our money, which was paid yearly by every adult Israelite, to the service of the temple, for the purpose of providing what was deemed requisite in its various ordinances. It appears that the payment of this tribute was a voluntary practice, which in our Lord's time was established rather by custom than by law; but yet its regular payment by him was a known fact, for when the receivers said to Peter, "Doth not your master pay tribute?" he answered, "Yes." The demand of this tribute was most probably made on Peter, because it was in his house at Capernaum that Jesus resided as an inmate. Peter, therefore, as master of the house, was considered responsible for all who dwelt in it. The piece of money found in the mouth of the fish was called a stater, being in value about two half-shekels, or two shillings and sixpence of our money; a sum, just exactly sufficient to pay the usual tribute both for our Lord and Peter. How the stater was provided, we are not informed, nor is it necessary we should be; for whether it had been lost in the sea by accident, or was conveyed thither by supernatural agency, or was created by our Lord immediately for the purpose, the circumstances attending it are still equally miraculous, and equally instructive. They

teach us certain important particulars respecting our Lord himself; and our duty as his followers.

I. RESPECTING OUR LORD HIMSELF. We are hereby taught,

1. *That he is infinite in knowledge.* He knew what the receivers of tribute had said in his absence, and prevented Peter's relation of it, by referring to it as soon as Peter came into the house; he knew that a stater was, or would be provided, with which they might be enabled to pay the tribute demanded; he knew that there was a fish in the sea of Galilee which would swallow this stater,—and he knew that this fish would certainly come to Peter's hook, and be taken by it. Well, therefore, might this apostle afterwards say unto him, "Lord, thou knowest all things." We are hereby taught,

2. *That he is almighty in power.* He that had before manifested his authority over the earth, by feeding the multitudes, and withering the fig-tree; and over the infernal regions, by casting out devils; here evinced the same authority over the fishes of the sea, by directing one of them to collect the money he required, and be the first that should come to Peter's hook.—The truth of this miracle is incontestable: there could be no collusion in it, as an unconscious fish was the agent employed in performing it; and there could be no deception in it, as hereby a striking prediction was fulfilled, a pressing exigency was relieved, and an accustomed demand was obtained. By this display of our Lord's perfections, we are also assured,

3. *That he is truly a divine person, and God over all.* The divinity of our Lord is hereby rendered undeniable; for he that knoweth all things, and can do whatever he pleases, must be God: but it is evident from this miracle that Jesus knows all things, and can do whatever he pleases, as the supreme Lord of the universe; therefore he is God, and as such we may address him, with Job, "I know that thou canst do every thing; and that no thought is withholden from thee," Job xlii. 2. We are also hereby instructed,

II. RESPECTING OUR DUTY AS CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS. As Christ's followers we are called to learn of him; and here, both by his example and counsel, he inculcates,

1. *Gratitude to God for his sustaining care over us.*—No doubt Peter was grateful to his master for the means by

which he was enabled to pay his tribute money, and the multitudes were grateful when our Lord fed them, and Elijah was grateful when he was daily fed by the ravens.—But God is still the same in his providential goodness to us. He does not indeed feed us by ravens; but in a way of lawful commerce, he renders greedy, selfish worldlings instrumental in supplying many of his servants with daily necessities. He does not multiply our bread on our tables; but, what is equally beneficial to us, he multiplies our corn in our fields. He does not send us money in the mouth of a fish; but still he supplies many both with wealth and sustenance, by the produce of the sea.—And we are as much indebted to God for his goodness in the ordinary course of his providence, as we should have been, had we been constantly sustained by miracles. Our lives thus sustained by him should be devoted to him, Rom. xii. 1.

2. *Exemplary submission to human authority.* Our Lord paid tribute himself, commanded Peter to do the same, and requires us to render unto all their dues. But our submission, like that of Christ, and his inspired servants, should be duly restricted, and never contrary to God's authority, Acts v. 29;—rationally guarded by a modest, but steadfast assertion of our civil right. (See our Lord here, and Paul, Acts xxii. 25.) These rights we should preserve undiminished; but still our submission, like that of our Lord, should be charitably yielded; so as not to "offend" others by needless or excessive contentions, Matt. v. 29—31.—And this submission should also be piously rendered, for the Lord's sake, that the tongue of slander may be silenced, 1 Pet. ii. 13, 15. Then we need not fear consequences, Matt. v. 5.

3. *Honesty, in the discharge of our pecuniary obligations.* It is worthy of our observation, that we find no less than three miracles wrought, that certain individuals might be enabled to pay their debts: thus, the widow's oil was multiplied, the iron was made to swim, and here the fish brings a stater in his mouth.—We should carefully recollect our various obligations: To our creditors—we owe them payment, Rom. xiii. 8. To our civil governors—we owe them tribute, &c. Rom. xiii. 5—7. To our teachers—we owe them suitable maintenance, Gal. vi. 6. To our parents—we owe them support, 1 Tim. v. 4—8. To our God—

we owe him assistance in promoting the interests of his kingdom, Judges, v. 23 ; and relieving his distressed members, Prov. iii. 27. We should labour, like Peter, to provide things honest. He went to the sea, and cast in his hook, and took the fish, and opened its mouth ; and in so doing he obtained the money he needed.—To expect relief without using proper means, is presumption. We must provide that we may be honest, and appear so, Rom. xii. 17.—When enabled by God's providence, we should first pay our debts, like Peter here ; he did not spend his stater in purchasing wine for his own indulgence, nor in making a feast for his family, but honestly went and paid his tribute with it. With what God sends us, we should first go and pay our debts, then we and our families may justly live of the rest, 2 Kings iv. 7.

4. *Undoubting affiance in our divine Redeemer.* From his knowledge and power, we know that all the treasures of the universe are at his disposal, 1 Cor. x. 26—28.—He is engaged by promise to withhold no good from us, Ps. lxxxiv. 11.—And all Christ's followers are interested in his unsearchable riches, 1 Cor. iii. 21—23 ; Ps. lxxxiv. 12.

ALPHA.

LXXVIII. FORGIVENESS OF SINS TO BE RETAINED ONLY ON CONDITION OF FORGIVING OTHERS.

MATTHEW xviii. 35.

“ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

WE consider it as a sort of Christian axiom, that, without the aid of divine grace, Christian duties cannot possibly be performed aright. And were we in many instances to esti-

mate the efficacy of grace from the behaviour of those who profess to be its subjects, we should conclude, that, even with its aid, Christians are unequal to the performance of Christian duties. Is not the forgiveness of injuries to be considered as a Christian duty? And do we not find many who profess to live under the influence of grace, defective in it? This defect must arise either from their not knowing that to forgive injuries is a Christian duty, or, from their inability to perform it. But how can any man, with the Bible in his hand, be ignorant that this is a Christian duty?—a thing so expressly and frequently enjoined. And what a reflection would it be on the gospel, to suppose men, even with divine aid, incapable of performing the duties which it enjoins! If therefore any, professing godliness, live in a spirit of implacability, it must be owing either to their want of the truth of grace, or to their inattention to the injunctions of the gospel. This being the case, how necessary is it to bring this important parable into the view of all who bear the Christian name! Peter had proposed the following question to our Lord—"How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?" To which Jesus replied, "I say not unto thee until seven times; but until seventy times seven." And to illustrate and support this reply, he spake the parable before us. In considering this subject we are led,

I. TO NOTICE THE PECULIAR PROPERTIES OF CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS. "If ye from your hearts forgive not," &c. It is a humiliating thought that one Christian brother should offend another! And yet the text supposes this to be matter of fact. And it is from the affinity of the offender that the difficulty of the duty arises, Ps. lv. 12, 13. This passage shews that the offence of a brother has something peculiarly aggravating in it. It ought, however, to be observed, that no truly Christian person will wilfully offend even the most profligate and abandoned, much more the saints of God; religion will not allow it. Yet, after all, that offences may and do come, cannot be denied. "It must needs be," &c. They will come, either through the ignorance or the thoughtlessness of the offending side; or through the extravagant claims, and the precipitate decision of the offended. But when such things do occur, he that has given cause for offence and complaint, ought to carry

himself in a humble and penitent manner towards the offended; to do what he can to counteract the effects of his own conduct; and to sue for reconciliation, Matt. v. 23—26. And in the moment that this is done, the offended must forgive. I will not deny but that the injured may suspend the exercise of his clemency on such circumstances as may serve to prevent a repetition of the offence: this will be but doing as God himself hath done. But then our forgiveness must be like his, hearty and complete. "If ye from," &c. It must be as prompt as it is perfect, Luke xvii. 3, 4; 2 Cor. ii. 7. From hence it appears,

1. That a forgiving disposition must never be a stranger to the Christian's bosom. Our Lord here uses a definite for an indefinite number, to shew us that the forgiveness of injuries is not a duty of only occasional or temporary obligation; but as constant and lasting as life itself. And,

2. It must be ingenuously exercised towards every repentant subject, without any revengeful or mistrustful reservations: no symptoms of an alienated heart must remain.

3. We judge that Jesus Christ would here teach us, that as judgment is a strange work with God, *i. e.* a work but seldom and reluctantly resorted to, and relinquished as speedily as possibly it can be, consistently with the great and important ends of his government, so ought it also to be with his children, who, in this respect, are to be his followers, as dear children, endeavouring to be perfect as their Father who is in heaven is perfect. Which leads us,

II. TO SHEW THAT EVERY CHRISTIAN IS UNDER AN OBLIGATION THUS TO FORGIVE. And,

1. The obligation springs from the consideration that possibly, and very probably, the colouring of the charge has been extravagantly heightened through overrating the importance of our own claims. And,

2. We say that the obligation of every Christian to forgive is heightened by the consideration of his own liability to offend, and so to need forgiveness, Gal. vi. 1.

3. The obligation to forgive is strengthened by the example of Jehovah, which ought to be imitated by us. (See ver. 32, 33.) Surely no man can plead any reason why he should not forgive his brother, which might not have been pleaded by Jehovah for withholding his own pardon. But,

4. That which carries the obligation to its height is, that God has commanded it, Matt. v. 23, 24 ; Mark xi. 25, 26 ; Col. iii. 12, 13. Can any quarrel with this command as an unreasonable one? Can any trample on it with impunity? To point out the perfection of this obligation, we hasten,

III. TO STATE THE MISERABLE CONDITION OF SUCH AS TRAMPLE ON THE OBLIGATION. And,

1. An unforgiving disposition will be a bar to forgiveness, if we never did possess it, Matt. vi. 14, 15. And if we have enjoyed it, it will deprive us of it. (See text.) This cannot surprise us, as the unforgiving subject shews either that he has not considered, or does not see his own offences in a proper point of light; or if he indistinctly sees his sinfulness, it is evident that he is not humbled on account of it, and, therefore, cannot have mercy shewn him. And although many have been sealed to him, as a proper object of mercy, yet, now that his character is changed, and he is again wanting in the qualities pre-requisite to a continuation of his forgiveness, it can no longer be extended to him.

2. An unforgiving disposition will place us in a hopeless state, if persisted in. "He shall be delivered to the tormentors until," &c. And when will he have paid the whole that is due? Ever? If so, why then should there be any such thing as "weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth?"

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Were you ever the subjects of mercy? And had you ever a clear sense of this? And are you now under a cloud? See that your present doubts and darkness do not spring from an approach to this unhappy temper.

2. If you never were partakers, but only have been suitors of mercy, especially if you have sought it for any length of time, carefully inquire, whether you are not kept from the enjoyment of it, by retaining an unforgiving spirit.

3. If you would attain to the highest certainty of a personal interest in the mercy of God, it must be by following after the strongest resemblance of his mercy and good will.

LXXIX. MEN NOT CHOSEN TO LIFE ON ACCOUNT OF THE PRIVILEGES THEY POSSESS, BUT OF THE IMPROVEMENT THEY MAKE OF THEM.

MATT. xx. 16.

“ So the last shall be first, and the first shall be last; for many be called, but few are chosen.”

WHAT an affecting proof is it of the corruption of our nature, that the gratuitous and pre-eminent favour of God to us should be the means of eliciting the worst principles in us, as vanity and jealousy. We become vain of his favour, and jealous lest others should share it with us. Such corruption we every day behold; and of the same thing the Jewish history is full. Their superior mercies rendered them both vain and jealous; hence, in almost all his discourses with them, our blessed Lord laboured to correct these evils in them, knowing well their fatal tendency. And as his disciples were but too much influenced by them, hence the frequency with which he ministered to them the same corrections. The close of the foregoing chapter furnishes an instance of the kind here referred to. Having uttered a necessary but a very distasteful sentiment, he judged it necessary to elucidate and establish it; and for this purpose he delivered the parable before us: and having attained his object, he closes his discourse with a repetition of this offensive, but awakening sentiment: “ So you see the first shall be last, and the last first; for many are called, but few are chosen.” These words lead us to observe,

I. THAT GOD, IN COMMUNICATING HIS BENEFITS TO MEN, ACTS IN A SOVEREIGN MANNER, MAKING THE LAST FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST. This is what he has done in nature. We see men in the same climate and kingdom, differing widely as to the elegance of their persons, their muscular and intellectual strength, &c. We also see a providential difference among men as it respects country, climate, for-

tune, friends, &c. Now is it not natural to expect the observation of the same order in all the works and ways of God? But the matter is put beyond all doubt. Look,

1. *At the different ages of the world, and mark the difference made.* Had respect to the creature been the principle regulating the distribution of God's gifts unto mankind, then had he placed the first ages of the world at least upon an equal footing with the last, with respect to the means of life. Were they not equally numerous, polished, and perfect? And yet to the ends of the ages has he reserved the best dispensations of his grace. But,

2. *Mark the difference he has made between persons of the same age, as to the means of salvation.* One nation has the gospel freely circulated through its population; preached by a great variety of the best ministers; and enjoys the best ordinances and churches. Another nation has nothing but traditional light to walk by, and that corrupted in the highest degree; has for its teachers and ministers a few crafty, dark, sensual, and devilish characters; has a set of unmeaning, cruel, and detestable rites substituted for the ordinances of God; and for the objects of its worship and adoration, men, creeping things, things destitute of life, and even devils. Nay,

3. *We cannot but notice a wonderful difference made among persons living in the same nation and place.* In some parts of our nation, for instance, there are none to preach the gospel, but immoral, sensual, and spiritless men; men who will preach any thing for the gospel, and who publicly connive at, if they do not recommend, the worst sentiments and practices. In such places you hear of nothing but of parties, assemblies, and of amusements; of cards, dice, billiards, plays, races, &c.; while, in another part of the nation, you hear nothing of these things; find an abundance of holy, evangelical ministers; numerous places of public worship crowdedly attended; together with many institutions which have for their object the improvement and welfare of all. Nay, in the very same town or village we mark the same difference among its population. One man, from his very childhood, is surrounded by the best examples; has at his command a choice selection of the most religious books; has all possible pains bestowed on his education; is placed under an intelligent, faithful, and

awakening ministry, and kept at the greatest distance from every temptation to evil; while another receives the most carnal and corrupting education, has no religious, but numbers of evil books, surrounding him; is encompassed on every side with the most pernicious examples; is studiously kept from any ministry that could do him good, and is led in the way of all temptation. Now whence is all this difference? Whence? I hesitate not to say from hence, that God has a right to do what he will with his own. Some of these differences, as you plainly see, spring from the absolute will of heaven, over which man has no control. And the rest, although they primarily proceed either from the perverseness of men in preventing the introduction of better helps to salvation, or from the remissness of others in sending them; yet as Jehovah might possibly overcome this perverseness, or this remissness, by the use of other and more extraordinary means, and does not; I scruple not therefore to say, that this difference is secondarily from him; that it arises from this circumstance,—he has a right to do what he will with his own, and is not obliged to give to any one more than sufficient helps to salvation. So far, therefore, as men of the same age, nation, or place differ, in respect to means of salvation, it is, in my opinion, principally, if not entirely owing to themselves; and the infelicity and blame, strictly speaking, lie at their own door. But the reason why some have means more than barely sufficient to bring them to salvation, and others not,—and why those who render ineffectual the means they have, are not favoured with others that are more powerful, is, because God, as a sovereign, has a right to do what he will with his own. On this observation we would graft the following instructions. (1.) So far as we have, by our negligence, deprived ourselves of the helps placed within our reach, and so have hindered our salvation, we are called on to repent of our evil doing. (2.) We ought thankfully to avail ourselves of what means we yet possess; and if we do this, we shall have no cause to envy others because God is good to them. But observe,

II. THAT IN BESTOWING HIS REWARDS ON MANKIND, GOD DOES NOT RENDER UNTO MEN ACCORDING TO THE AMOUNT OF THE MEANS THEY PARTICIPATE, BUT THE USE THEY MAKE OF THEM.

1. In bestowing his rewards, were he regulated by the former principle, the text must be false; as, on that principle, it would be impossible for the first to be last, and the last first. But if his rewards are bestowed on the latter principle, the text may, and even must be true. Besides,

2. To say that the enjoyment of superior means of salvation secures the enjoyment of the most distinguished rewards, is to represent the character of God in a most unfavourable point of light. Have those who have been most highly favoured as to privileges, always been the holiest men? On the contrary, have they not too frequently been the very reverse of this? What ideas must we then have of God's holiness, to suppose him advancing such men to his first rewards? Or have the most highly exalted as to privileges, always been the most grateful for them? Rather have they not been the contrary? What ideas then must we have of God's justice, to suppose him capable of advancing these to the most distinguished seats in bliss? especially while those who most faithfully improved such means as were bestowed on them, are either wholly or comparatively disregarded? Or were he to lift men to the highest states in glory, merely because they have enjoyed the best helps to salvation, in what light must we consider his veracity?

3. Were we to assert that men are rewarded according to the amount of their means of good, and not according to the use they make of them, we should assert a doctrine which would be found false in fact. The Jews partook of superior means of good, but were unchurched for their abuse of them. The cities of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida were exalted to heaven with privileges; and for their abuse of them were thrust down to hell. The churches of Lesser Asia were highly favoured as to privileges, and were awfully menaced for their abuse of them: and where are those churches now? And have not we ourselves known many persons who were rendered remarkable by their privileges, rendered as remarkable by judicial visitations for their abuse of them? If these facts have any voice, do they not say, that not those who are most exalted by privileges, but those who make the best use of what they have, are raised to the highest degrees of glory? Here then we would remark, that as no man will be any

farther benefited by the privileges he enjoys, than he uses them aright; so, on the other hand, every man who abuses his advantages will be punished in proportion as he does so. Observe,

III. THAT THE BESTOWMENT OF REWARDS ON THIS PRINCIPLE IS MOST EXPRESSIVE OF THE GOODNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD. "Is thine eye evil because mine is good? go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee," &c.

1. *This is most expressive of God's goodness*, as it opens the gates of life to all, seeing all in the improvement of their privileges may live; and live in proportion to that improvement, whether their privileges have been great or small: whereas if those only could attain to eminence in bliss who have been eminent in the possession of privileges, then could but few attain to eminence in bliss.

2. *As this mode of distributing rewards is most expressive of God's goodness, so also of his justice.* Were he to close the gates of life against any but those who abuse what privileges they have; or to withhold the highest degrees of bliss from those who are not favoured with the most exalted privileges, however they improve the privileges they have; in either case he would act most capriciously and unjust, and would flatly contradict the numerous and striking statements of his most holy word.

We close this subject with two reflections:

1. There will be no reason to impeach the perfections of God, because some and even many will perish for ever, since all may be saved, and none will be condemned but such as deserve so to be.

2. There is great need often to examine ourselves, seeing those who are first as to privileges, may be last in respect to reward.

IOTA.

LXXX. THE NATURE AND OBLIGATION OF WATCHFULNESS.

MARK xiii. 37.

“And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.”

WE are told in the sacred Scriptures, that for every thought, word, and action, in this probationary state, we shall be brought to judgment; and though the time thereof be not mentioned, yet we are certain that that time is fast approaching, and each succeeding day brings it nearer. We should seriously consider, that however far off the day of his coming to the future judgment may be, that of his coming by death is near; and that, as to our soul, will be the same as if it was to the final judgment. Death as effectually determines the state of individuals, as the final audit will that of the whole world. And if we are not ready for death, it is impossible we should ever be prepared for the general judgment; and the time of Christ's coming by death is as uncertain as the time of his coming to judgment. Hence the words of our Saviour in the text, “And what I say unto you,” my immediate disciples, “I say unto all, Watch.” Watchfulness comprehends the whole care of a Christian life. Considerable difficulty would attend the enumeration of all those particulars about which it ought to be employed; but yet, there are two which probably may include all,—watching to prevent evil, and to do good.

I. WE MUST WATCH, THAT WE MAY PREVENT EVIL.

1. *We must watch against sin.* The corrupt inclination of our fallen nature, while unregenerate, to what is sinful, the apostle calls “sin that dwelleth in us,” Rom. vii. 17; and is a constant, powerful stimulus to the actual commission of sin. This principle of sin in the heart is opposite to divine grace, and which we must watch against. There are sins of spiritual weakness and moral infirmity, which, as long as we mourn over, and endeavour to overcome through faith in Christ, are consistent with the favour of God, peace of conscience, and a well-grounded hope of

happiness after death ; or else, who could be saved ? But presumptuous sins, which are deliberate and chosen, committed against the sanctions of judgment and dictates of conscience, are direct insults offered to the authority of God. Watchfulness is necessary, that we sin not thus : for we are daily compassed with snares and temptations ; and, while corrupt nature is within us, it renders those snares and temptations more dangerous, and often fatal. The objects around us, our company, society, callings, and circumstances, may prove unhappy occasions of sin to us ; and therefore there is need of regarding that precept,—“ Keep thy heart with all diligence : for out of it are the issues of life,” Prov. iv. 23.

2. *We must guard against the world.* The present world is an enemy to our souls ; therefore the apostle calls it an “ evil world,” Gal. i. 4. It is evil, not in itself, as if it were necessarily set against our spiritual interests : no, the present world is the effect of God’s creating energy, and “ every creature of his is good,” 1 Tim. iv. 4 ; but it is evil by reason of the strong bias and inclination of our hearts to visible and tangible objects, in preference to those which are spiritual and heavenly. The things of the world are suitable to our corrupt passions and vicious appetites, and excite and inflame them, like food that is pleasant but unwholesome, and feeds the disease. We must watch that the world do not insinuate itself into our hearts and affections. Pious men, while under easy and prosperous circumstances,—while they have every thing according to their desire,—are in great danger of being too fond of this world, and of saying in their hearts, not in a good sense, “ It is good to be here.” Though they are sincerely desirous to go to heaven at last, they are not anxious and hasty as to the time—are still for a further respite—to be spared a little longer before they go hence and are seen no more. And while we are watchful against this world, we should be daily endeavouring to compose our minds to a greater indifference to its pleasures and entertainments, in compliance with that exhortation of the apostle, recorded 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. It is but a short scene which will be shortly shifted, and succeeded with an eternal state of things ; and therefore, says the apostle, “ Let your moderation be known unto all men ; the Lord is at hand,” Phil. iv. 5.

3. *We must watch against the temptations of the devil.* He

is another great enemy of our souls, and continually engaged to estrange our affections from God, to the practice of iniquity. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Pet. v. 8. The devil is professedly an enemy to all mankind, and from hatred and envy prosecutes a mischievous and destructive design against our spiritual and everlasting interests. He is very formidable, being subtle, and using many wiles, devices, and stratagems, to effect the ruin of souls. He is strong, inasmuch as his power is far superior to ours. His malice is deadly, to which his diligence and activity are equal;—he is restless in pursuing his pernicious designs. The Scriptures assure us, that our spiritual foes are numerous, Eph. vi. 12; and all these, possessing a spiritual nature, are invisible. Constant watchfulness is necessary against such combined opposition. Our best defence is to watch against the world, and sin in the heart; for Satan, tempting by the world, can do us no harm without the concurrence of our own sinful passions, and the consent of the will. For however strong, cunning, and industrious he is, his manner of tempting is but objective; he cannot force us. Hence those words of the apostle, "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed," James i. 14. These are the enemies we are to watch against.

II. WE MUST WATCH TO DO GOOD.

1. *We have to discharge all the duties we owe to God, and our fellow-christians and neighbours; to improve all our talents wisely and faithfully.* Our Saviour represents all those powers, abilities, and capacities with which God has endued us, as so many particular trusts committed to us, of which we must give an account: to those that employ them well, to the great purposes of God's honour, the interests of religion, and the good of others, he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." But, on the other hand, if persons have had spiritual gifts and abilities, and have not employed them some way or other in the service of God and edification of others;—if time, that precious talent, has been squandered away in idleness and vanity; if that time which is appropriated to God himself, to his own worship, has been prostituted to common and profane uses; if the gospel, the ordinances, and institutions thereof,

for the refreshing the bowels of the poor, especially of Christ's poor members and servants; in short, if men have not made a good use of their opportunities of receiving good themselves, and doing good to others,—they shall be found in the number of unprofitable servants that have not improved their Lord's talents; and the doom that will be pronounced on such is, "Cast ye the unprofitable servants into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matt. xxv. 30.

2. *We must watch to do all the good that God has commanded us.* We are to perform all the duties of the first and second tables, to observe all moral precepts and positive institutions, to do every duty, without exception, that relates to God, to others, and to ourselves. Moses said unto the children of Israel, "You shall walk in all the precepts which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you," Deut. v. 33.

3. *We must watch to do good in its proper season.* The acceptable performance of duty depends in a great measure on its being done seasonably. We may say of a work done, as well as a word spoken, in due season, "How good is it!" Prov. xv. 23. Many actions, which as to the matter of them have been good, have lost much of their beauty through the ill timing of them. As God appoints a time to every purpose, so should we, Eccles. iii. 1. We should learn to put every duty into method, that they may all fall in their proper place and season, without any one interfering with another. The arranging and disposing our duties well is a great thing in religion.

4. *We must watch to do good in the appointed manner.* We should possess a quick apprehension of those things that are helps of a spiritual life. We are to do good in the lively exercise of every Christian grace, of love to God and our neighbours, an active zeal for his glory and their welfare, a steady faith in his promises, and joyful hope of the heavenly blessedness, a dependance on the mediation of Christ, and the aid of the Holy Spirit for assistance in, and acceptance of, what we do.

APPLICATION.

Let us be exact in the performance of this duty of watchfulness. Let us not sleep as others, but watch. And to excite this obligation, let us consider,

1. How naturally prone we are to become secure and careless.

2. That without watchfulness we shall become an easy prey to our worst enemy.

3. Without this, though our vigilant enemy should not attack us, we can perform no duty that will be acceptable to God.

4. Strict and constant watchfulness will be a safeguard against all snares and temptations of every kind.

5. Let us therefore watch, and, as our Saviour advised his disciples, join prayer to watchfulness, Matt. xxvi. 41. Watch, that we may do what is enjoined us, and pray, that God may fulfil all his gracious promises. It is earnest prayer that makes watchfulness effectual. Pray with a particular view to daily dangers, as not knowing what may happen; as our Lord has taught in that excellent directory for prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," Matt. vi. 13.

THETA.

LXXXI. CHRIST, HE THAT SHOULD COME.

LUKE vii. 19.

"Art thou he that should come? or, look we for another?"

THESE words were addressed to our Lord by two disciples of John the Baptist, who sent them to Jesus, and instructed them to make these inquiries for the confirmation of their faith.

1. The question could not be proposed on John's account, for he was fully convinced that Christ was the true Messiah. Of this he was assured by divine revelation, and the testimony of God the Father at our Lord's baptism, John i. 32; Matt. iii. 17. And that Jesus was the Messiah, John uniformly testified, by speaking of him as the Son of God, as incomparably superior to himself, as the

·Lamb of God, and as come to baptize with the Holy Ghost.

2. But though John believed in Jesus, and thus bore witness to him, yet it seems these disciples and their brethren were led to doubt even the testimony of their Master. It is probable they thus doubted, because they did not find Jesus setting up a splendid earthly kingdom, such as they expected the Messiah would establish; because our Lord was not so rigidly abstemious as their Master was; and because no miracle was wrought to deliver John out of prison; which they concluded the Messiah would certainly be both inclined and able to work, on such an occasion.

3. For the kind purpose of removing their doubts, and satisfying their minds, John therefore prudently sent them to hear, see, and judge for themselves; and with this view he taught them to make the inquiries now before us, "Art thou," &c. The purport of these questions may be expressed thus: 'Sacred prophecy leads us to expect that the Messiah, the Lord's anointed, will appear in this land about this time. We entreat thee therefore to inform us whether thou art this great expected personage or not, that we may respect thee according to thy proper character.' To these inquiries our Lord wisely answers by actions rather than words, ver. 21. Then he requires the messengers to go and inform John what they had seen and heard, ver. 22, 23. Hereby Jesus evidently referred to sacred prophecy for an answer to these important questions. And as we are no less interested in this answer than John's disciples, let us consider,

I. THE TESTIMONY OF SACRED PROPHECY CONCERNING THE MESSIAH.

1. *Respecting the person who should come under this character.* He is spoken of and described as David's Son, and Lord, Psalm lxxxix. 29, and cx. 1; as Immanuel, Isa. vii. 14; the Child born, and the Mighty God, Isa. ix. 6.

2. *Respecting the time when he should come.* This was to be, before the sceptre departed from the tribe of Judah, Gen. xlix. 10; within the seventy weeks of Daniel, or 490 years after the Persian decree which was passed for rebuilding Jerusalem, Dan. ix. 24—26; and during the continuance of the second temple, Hag. ii. 7, 9.

3. *Respecting the purposes of his coming.* These were, to guide as a Prophet, Deut. xviii. 18; to govern as a King, Ps. ii. 6; to save us as our Redeemer, Isa. xxxv. 4; to feed us as a Shepherd, Isa. xl. 11; and to reward us as our Judge, Isa. xl. 10, and xxxiii. 22.

4. *Respecting some remarkable circumstances which would attend his coming.* As the performance of various benevolent miracles, Isa. xxix. 18, and xxxv. 5, 6; silent modesty in working these miracles, Isa. xlii. 2, 3; a gracious reception of the poor by him, Isa. xxix. 19, and lxi. 1; and the reception of him by the Jewish nation, Isa. viii. 14, and liii. 1. This is the testimony of prophecy, which St. Peter informs us is sure in its accomplishment, and should engage our attention, 2 Pet. i. 19. Let us therefore notice,

II. THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST. Here observe,

1. *These prophecies must be fulfilled in some person;* as the time specified for their accomplishment has long been past. For the sceptre departed from the tribe of Judah, and the second temple was destroyed, about seventeen hundred and fifty years since; and Daniel's seventy weeks expired about forty years before these events took place. In other words, our Jesus, the Messiah, was cut off by death, just when those weeks were expiring; and about forty years before the destruction of the temple. Observe,

2. *These prophecies have been exactly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.* Witness his two natures, human and divine, Rom. ix. 5; hence he was David's Lord; and Immanuel; the Child born, and the Mighty God. The time of his coming; he came when the sceptre was about to depart from the tribe of Judah; as a proof of which, just at the time of his birth a decree for taxing the land of Judea was passed by Augustus the Roman Emperor, Luke ii. 1, 2, 5. He came just exactly at the end of Daniel's seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety years after the commandment or decree given to Ezra to rebuild Jerusalem. And he came while the second temple stood; and cleansed it, and taught in it. His various offices; he is our prophet, John vi. 14, and viii. 12; our King, Luke i. 33; Acts v. 31; our Saviour, Matt. i. 21; 1 Tim. i. 15; our Shepherd, John x. 11, 27, 28; and our Judge, Acts xvii. 30, 31. And the circumstances

attending his coming. Was the Messiah to work benevolent miracles? Christ wrought such, as here in the presence of John's disciples. Was the Messiah to be modest in performing them? so was our Lord, Matt. xii. 16—21. Was the Messiah to teach the poor? so did Jesus, Luke iv. 18, 21. Was the Messiah to be rejected by the Jews? so was Jesus, John i. 11. As all these prophecies have been fulfilled in our Lord, so we observe,

3. *They have been fulfilled in no other.* This is evident from the appeal of Christ's friends, the advocates of Christianity, who challenge the world to produce any person, besides our Lord, in whom these predictions have been accomplished. And from the concessions of Christ's enemies, the Jews; who can produce no person beside our Jesus, whom they reject, and still perversely look for another. Hence let us consider,

III. THE CONCLUSION WE SHOULD DRAW FROM THIS ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PROPHECY IN THE PERSON OF OUR LORD. We should conclude,

1. *That our Jesus is certainly the true Messiah.* For infinite wisdom could not mistake in its prophetic descriptions; and infinite truth cannot mislead us, Deut. xxxii. 4.

2. *That we should look for no other Saviour.* To look for another would be impious, by discrediting God himself, 1 John v. 10; it would be ungrateful, by slighting the richest love, John iii. 16; it would be unreasonable, opposed to the clearest evidence, 2 Thess. iii. 2; it would be unnecessary, for Christ is all-sufficient to save, Heb. vii. 25; it would be vain, for no other Saviour will come, Heb. x. 26; it must be destructive, Christ being our only remedy, Prov. xxix. 1.

3. *That we should see experimental proofs of Christ's divine authority.* The proofs arising from the fulfilment of prophecy are rational ones, and of no small importance; but those most satisfactory to us are experimental ones, resembling our Lord's miracles; including spiritual life, sight, strength, purity, health, and comfort. Seek these as of the first importance, Prov. iv. 7; Matt. vi. 33; seek them with confidence, for Christ is come for the purpose of bestowing these blessings on mankind, Isa. lxi. 1, 2, 3; John iii. 17.

4. *That Christ's coming should engage Christians in the practice of holy duties.* As, compassion for lost sinners, Luke xix. 10; Phil. ii. 5; as evidences of this, pray and

labour for their conversion, James v. 16, 19, 20; beneficence to the poor, 2 Cor. viii. 9; hope of perfect purity, 1 John iii. 8; and grateful adoration, Luke i. 68.

ALPHA.

LXXXII. JESUS INDISPOSED TO CONDEMN THE SINNER.

JOHN viii. 11.

“And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more”

THESE words throw some light on those of the evangelist, where he says, that “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved;” and form a striking contrast between the gentle and benignant disposition of the Saviour, and that of the unbending severity evinced in the spirit of those Jews who brought this adulteress before him. They were bent on sacrificing either the culprit or the Saviour, or both: on the contrary, he was intent on confounding their wickedness, and rescuing this poor sinner. But what gives the passage its greatest interest is, the light which it casts on the condition of the sinner, when brought into contact with his Judge and Saviour. That this may be placed more fully before you, allow me to observe,

I. THAT THE TEXT NEITHER AFFIRMS NOR INSINUATES THAT OUR LORD HAD NO GROUNDS ON WHICH HE MIGHT HAVE JUSTLY CONDEMNED HER, HAD HE BEEN DISPOSED SO TO DO. Let it be remembered that she (as all others are) was a sinner, both by nature and by practice; and what is more to be regarded, she had been detected in a dreadful crime, and stood exposed to a capital and dreadful punish-

ment. (See Lev. xx. 10—22.) Nor was she alone in her crime; for many then, and many now, stand accused of their own consciences and of God, of sins as great as this, if not this very sin: all such, consequently, are justly liable to condemnation from the Lord. And possibly this may be the case with some of us. All such persons, if they think at all on the consequences of their sins, must feel as this poor sinner must have felt, full of shame and anxiety, when brought into the presence and unto the person of her Judge and Saviour for his decision in her case. Aware of their liability to condemnation, they must be the subjects of painful and pungent feelings, when they think of the appearance they must make before their Judge; particularly when they imagine that that event is drawing nigh, and at the very door. If any such are here, allow me,

II. TO DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THAT DECISION WHICH THE TEXT REPORTS THE SAVIOUR TO HAVE GIVEN IN THE CASE OF THIS POOR SINNER. “Where are thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.” The letter of the law, in her case, gave her no right to anticipate such a decision; nor yet the usage of her nation, corrupt and adulterous as it was at this time; nor was there any thing in the character and proceedings of the Saviour to flatter the unbecoming hopes of any sinner. What then must have been her feelings, when this judgment was given in her favour! Nor would this decision be less surprising to the assembly in which she stood. It partly originated in the consideration that the Jews were wishful to draw Jesus into a snare, and partly in the circumstance that it was not his province to judge her, he being no magistrate, and therefore having no authority to judge. And had he been authorised to judge, yet as there were no witnesses brought forward to establish her guilt, and as her guilt had not been proved, as yet, in any court of justice, to have condemned her would have been illegal. But the leniency of this decision was chiefly founded on the fact, that the Divine Being has no pleasure in the death of sinners; and so is unwilling to punish when he can spare them righteously. And possibly, and we are led to think that most probably, this decision was founded on the discovery of a broken and contrite heart in this poor sinner. And if she was in any

degree the subject of gracious feeling, we may confidently affirm that her faith would operate in no small degree to influence the Saviour's judgment in her favour. And think you is there any change or deterioration in him? Is he less kind, or able, that the same principles and circumstances should not operate on him with the same certainty of success? Surely, my fellow-sinners, if he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, it follows, that great sinners as you may judge or feel yourselves to be, if you are penitent and believing, a decision equally favourable will go forth, nay is gone forth, in your favour. Let this consideration cheer you; but never forget, in the

III. And last place, THE ADMONITION GIVEN TO THIS POOR SINNER—"Go, and sin no more." In this admonition she was reminded,

1. That she might think herself happy in having escaped the penalty due to her heinous sins.

2. That though she had escaped the consequences of her past sins, yet if she proceeded to the commission of fresh ones, that circumstance would not only involve her in fresh, but aggravated guilt.

3. That there was no necessity for her proceeding any further in her evil courses, since the grace of God was equal to her deliverance and perservation. And,

4. She was reminded that the retention of her purity would be the retention of her felicity; and the measure of the former the limit of the latter.

From this subject let us learn,

1. To admire that we are not actually and irreversibly condemned of the Lord, as we might have been.

2. Let the encouraging fact placed before us in this Scripture, instead of making us secure, stimulate us to an immediate redemption of our opportunity of applying to the Saviour. And,

3. Let us endeavour to walk worthy of the Lord's kindness, in rescuing and admonishing us; first, by strictly adhering to the admonition; and secondly, by publishing the praises of our divine Redeemer.

IOTA.

LXXXIII. CONTINUANCE IN CHRIST'S WORD A MARK OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP.

JOHN viii. 31, 32.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

THESE words form part of a conversation between our Lord and the Jews, in which they were endeavouring to ensnare him. And because his wisdom was too much for them, subtle as they were, their venomous minds led them to wrangle with him. But he so effectually rebutted their charges, and defended himself, that several of the Jews believed on him. But either seeing them to be insincere, or not likely to continue because of the difficulties with which they would have to struggle, he observed, “Then are ye my disciples indeed, if ye continue in my word,” &c. A disciple is one who learns of another; and a disciple of Christ is one who doctrinally and practically follows him. Many affect to be, and are even taken to be, his disciples, and are not; but here we have,

I. THE CHARACTERISTIC OF A TRUE DISCIPLE; he is one who continues in Christ's word. We have,

II. THE ADVANTAGES PECULIAR TO SUCH A CHARACTER: “And ye shall know the truth,” &c.

I. WE HAVE THE CHARACTERISTIC OF A TRUE DISCIPLE. He continues in Christ's word. By Christ's word we understand his message, doctrine, and gospel. This message he received from his Father, and gave to his disciples, John xvii. 8; he calls it the manifesting his Father's name to them, John xvii. 6; and in another place he calls it his Father's glory, which he had given to them, John xvii. 22. This message, or these words they had received,—they not only knew or were assured of its having proceeded from God, but received it as divine; looking on it at all times as such, revering it as such, loving it as such, meditating on it as such, observing it as

such, and in short endeavouring to do as directed by it. This is called keeping the word, which the disciples are said to have done, John xvii. 6; and without which Christ cannot acknowledge any as his disciples, Luke vi. 46. Now as the receiving this word constitutes a disciple in truth, so continuing in this word, *i. e.* in this regard to it, constitutes a disciple indeed; by which we understand something more than a true or real disciple, even an eminent and worthy disciple, such a disciple as all should be. And so to be Christ's disciple yields great advantage, as we have,

II. TO SHEW THE ADVANTAGES PECULIAR TO SUCH A CHARACTER. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Because Christ himself is called the truth, (John xiv. 6,) some have considered this promise, "Ye shall know the truth," &c. as referring to himself, whom they should know more perfectly as to his divine origin, divinity, ability to save, &c. But by the truth we may, and by it I do, understand him to speak of the word which he had given, which he expressly and emphatically calls the truth, John xvii. 17; and prays that they may be sanctified by it, hereby intimating that its great object is to make us free. And this same message of mercy is elsewhere called truth, John i. 17; James v. 19; and is that truth to which Jesus Christ came to bear witness, or to publish, John xviii. 37. Now our Lord assures them,

1. *That they should know this truth.* This cannot mean the first and lowest degrees of knowledge of this truth, as they were possessed of this already, and could not be his disciples without it. It must refer to those more ample or perfect degrees of knowledge which can only spring from a longer acquaintance with the truth; such an acquaintance with it as will give us a more perfect knowledge of its divine origin, meaning, and excellency. But,

2. *The promise is, that the truth so known shall make us free.* It has been supposed that these words were spoken in a Sabbatical year, when our Lord took occasion from that circumstance to set forth the excellence of that freedom which he gives to his followers. By nature, or by birth, all are the slaves of sin and Satan, Eph. ii. 3; but many either do not see, or will not own this doctrine. Such was the case with the Jews in Christ's time: "We

never were in bondage," said they, "to any man." From this bondage the truth alone can release us, correcting our errors, and rendering us incapable either of loving or living in sin, or without the purgation of our consciences. Nay, according to Archbishop Tillotson and others, this promise has a higher meaning still, contrasting the state of a slave who is liable to be put out of his master's family, with that of a son who must remain in the family, and partake of its privileges; and that our Lord here assures such as are his disciples indeed, that he, as Son, (who either along with the Father manages the estate, or succeeds him in it,) will give them every privilege that is to be enjoyed in the family.

In conclusion let us,

1. Reflect carefully on the state of our birth, that we may be affected by it, and give thanks unto God for our means of deliverance.

2. Let us, as professors of religion, be careful to ascertain that we have the characteristic of genuine disciples. And,

3. Let us not forget that it is eminent discipleship that entitles a man to eminent privileges.

IOTA.

LXXXIV. UNION WITH CHRIST NECESSARY TO OUR BEARING CHRISTIAN FRUIT.

JOHN xv. 5.

"For without me ye can do nothing."

THESE words were spoken by Jesus Christ to his apostles and disciples, either in the room where they had eaten the pascal supper, or in their way to Gethsemane. They were about to be peculiarly tried by the seizure and crucifixion of their Master, and exposed to the danger of defection, either through discouragement or terror; hence were they

instructed, encouraged, and exhorted. In the context Christ calls himself a Vine; and likens his followers to branches of himself, and his Father to the Vine-dresser, &c.

I. THESE WORDS SUPPOSE THAT THE VINE-DRESSER EXPECTS ALL BRANCHES IN THE VINE TO BEAR FRUIT. And why?

Because of the relation in which they stand to Christ. They are branches in him. This is not spoken of being in him by profession only, for mere profession gives no man a place in him, the true Vine. Hence profession, though it naturally leads men to look for fruit, never can lead Jehovah to expect it, when he sees it to be alone. Had not the disciples been truly grafted into Christ, there would neither have been any propriety nor any sense in menacing them with excision, which nevertheless he did. (See verse 2.) And had they been in him by profession only, he could not have truly affirmed that they were clean, which he did. (Verse 3.) And having been made clean through the word spoken by the Saviour, (verse 3,) and by the pruning of the Father, (verse 2,) it was reasonable to expect fruit. But what fruit did he expect? Why,

1. Not a mixture of good and evil fruit, as some contend, Matt. vii. 15—20.

2. Such as may reasonably be expected on a healthy branch, nourished by the very best of vines; hence good in quality, abundant in quantity, and constantly bearing, (verse 16.) In short,

3. Such are expected to be filled with the fruits of righteousness, Phil. i. 11. But thus, as we have to shew,

II. NONE CAN BE FRUITFUL WITHOUT OR SEPARATE FROM CHRIST. “Without me ye can do nothing.” These words, without me, mean, without your being in me, (see ver. 4,) and without my being in you, (see ver. 5.) Hence we say that he who was never truly in Christ, and never had Christ truly in him, such an one not only cannot now bring forth fruit, but never did, and never could. And he who has been truly in him, and has borne fruit to the glory of the Vine-dresser, will no longer continue to do so than he abides in Christ, and Christ in him, (see ver. 4.) But having once had Christ in him, can he ever lose him? Yes, unless he abide in Christ and keep his word, (ver. 7.)

But having once been in Christ, and having had his words in us, can we ever fall from this relation to him? Undoubtedly, or why this caution? And how else can we be taken away? (ver. 2.) Indeed, we have only to remember how we came into this relation, to be convinced that we may fall from it. Nor need this possibility of falling from it discourage us at all, since we may stand, and cannot fall but by our own neglect. (See 2 Pet. i. 5—10.) Let us but guard our faith in Christ, our love to Christ, and our hope in him; and in order to this, let us but give attention to his words, and it will be impossible for us to fall; for in that case, whatever we ask will be done for us, (see ver. 7.) Nay, so far are we from being discouraged because there is a possibility of our falling, and because we cannot stand separate from Christ; that on the contrary, we feel divinely confident that this perpetual jealousy will constantly secure such aid from Christ, as will enable us to do all things.

IMPROVEMENT.

Since we cannot be saved without fruit, and cannot bear it without Christ, let us carefully inquire if we are in him.

And since we may be in him, and yet be in a perishing state, let us take care that our fruit be neither declining in quality nor quantity.

Nor let us be content with being as good as we ever were, but let us endeavour to be as much better as possible.

And now let us make every necessary effort to be thus fruitful.

IOTA.

LXXXV. THE PRAYER OF CHRIST FOR HIS DISCIPLES.

JOHN xvii. 15.

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil,"

SUCH was the prayer of Christ for his disciples, who had long been his attendants and companions. They were intimately acquainted both with his public and private life. They had been the witnesses of his piety, and zeal, and benevolence, and of the many mighty works which had shewn themselves forth in him. They had beheld him worshipped as a God, and execrated as the prince of the devils, and always with the most perfect equanimity of mind, never being elated by the one, nor depressed by the other. Such was the prayer of Christ for his disciples when about to leave them. The time of his departure was at hand, and he was ready to be offered up. His removal was to them an extremely painful event—their hearts were troubled. They could not bear the idea of separation from him whom they so much loved, in whose company they had enjoyed so much pleasure, and from whose instruction and example, and guardian care, they had derived so much profit. Their Lord knew all this, and therefore before he left them he delivered a farewell address, contained in the three preceding chapters, abounding in admonition, and instruction, and comfort. Having finished his address to them, he here addresses his Father and their Father, his God and their God. The chapter before us comprehends the whole of this address. He first prays for himself, (ver. 5 ;) secondly, for his disciples, (ver. 9 ;) and, finally, for all who should through their instrumentality either immediately or remotely become his disciples, (ver. 20.) Our text primarily respected his apostles, but there is no impropriety in extending its application to Christians in the present day.

Were they apostles in the world? So are we. Were they in danger from evil? So are we. Did Christ pray for them? He also prays for us. In the whole of this prayer, therefore, we are all deeply interested. Let us first consider the present situation of Christians; and, secondly, the prayer of Christ.

I. CONSIDER THE PRESENT SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS. At present they are in the world, a world opposite to God and holiness. And whilst here they are frequently obliged to mix with those whom our Lord calls "the children of this world." With them they live in the same house, are employed in the same shops, and transact the same business. Christianity neither calls to the desert, nor to the monastic cell: it contemplates them as men as well as Christians, as members of civil, as well as members of religious society; and whilst it requires them to be fervent in spirit, it also enjoins diligence in business, and exacts from them their proper quota towards the existence and comfort of civil society. But though in the world, they are not of it; they have received another spirit, even the Spirit which is of God. Hence,

1. *They are governed by other principles.* The children of this world seek their supreme happiness in the world in some of its various modifications. In it are all their springs, and they never look higher. Impelled by the desire of happiness, the covetous man rises early, and late takes rest, adopts base and penurious habits, racks the powers of his mind to form plans, and exhausts the energies of his body in executing them, that he may increase his earthly possessions. Impelled by this, the ambitious man pants after place, and office, and honourable distinction in society. He labours to climb the steep and slippery ascent to the bubble fame which human breath has created, and which it can suddenly destroy. Impelled by this, the licentious man, regardless of character and health, alike indifferent about the misery he inflicts on his own family, or on the families of others, pursues with the utmost zeal the unlimited indulgence of all his animal appetites. But Christians seek their supreme happiness in God. They prefer the favour of God to all the riches in the universe; the honour of being his children to that of occupying the highest distinctions in society; and the pleasures of true religion,

arising from peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, and the hope of eternal life, to all the gratifications of sense. And as they are governed by other principles, so also,

2. *They live for other purposes.* The children of this world live to themselves; so much is implied in St. Paul's words, Rom. xiv. 7. Self is the centre and the circumference of all their plans. They have no reference to God in any thing they do. But Christians, recognizing the doctrine of the apostle, "ye are not your own, but are bought with a price," live to the Lord. His will is their rule; his glory is their end; whilst to him they consecrate their health, their property, their influence, their talents, and all the activities of both body and mind. We proceed,

II. TO CONSIDER THE PRAYER OF CHRIST. And here it will be proper to remark,

1. *For what Christ does not pray.* "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world." Many have desired to be taken out of the world. This desire has sometimes had its origin in deep suffering. Sorrow has succeeded sorrow, as wave succeeds wave, in such rapid and constant succession, that, overcome with grief, they have said with David, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest." And sometimes it originates in lively foretastes of eternal life. The anticipation of heaven so far transcends and eclipses all earthly enjoyments, that they desire to "depart and to be with Christ." This desire is perfectly proper, when tempered with submission. We must wait the Lord's time; for many important ends are accomplished through the continuance of Christians in the world. (1.) Through their continuance in the world the excellence and power of divine grace are manifested.—What were these once? Ignorant, depraved, children of wrath, haters of God, and of each other. What are they now? Wise unto salvation, renewed in the spirit of their mind, children of God, active in doing, and patient in suffering his will, and zealous in promoting the happiness of mankind. By what power has this change been produced? "Not by human might nor power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." (2.) Through their continuance in the world a longer seed-time is afforded to them. All who die in the Lord shall be perfectly happy. Not equally so. Every vessel will be full, but some will contain much more than

others. We are all pardoned and saved through the merit and by the influence of Christ. But the degrees of future glory will be in proportion to our work of faith, our patience of hope, and our labour of love. The thief who was crucified with Christ is in heaven as well as St. Paul, but the glory of the latter far transcends that of the former. Why? Because the one after his conversion had no seed-time; the other had a long one, which he fully occupied in sowing to the Spirit. O what a harvest will the apostle have! In this view, long life by the Christian is desirable. (3.) Through their continuance in the world the pride of Satan is perpetually mortified. When he seduced our first parents, he hoped to govern them. When he beheld a son in their own fallen likeness, he hoped to have the absolute dominion over their progeny. The piety of Abel and Seth disappointed this hope. The dominion of the adversary has never been universal. It is now diminishing. It shall be destroyed. (4.) Through their continuance in the world, its conversion is promoted. God could convert the world without instruments. He has chosen to employ instruments. The instruments he employs are his own people. To them he has committed the heavenly treasure. Through their preaching and living, he makes his way known, and will make it known in all the earth, and his saving health among all nations. (5.) Through their continuance in the world, its existence is prolonged. The world exists for the sake of the church. It is the theatre in which God performs his redeeming acts. It is the school in which men are educated for heaven. But let all the pupils be removed from this school; let all who submit to the redeeming operations of God be taken away, and the great theatre would be destroyed. The absence of ten righteous persons occasioned the destruction of Sodom. The complete removal of the righteous would bring the final conflagration. Remark,

2. *For what Christ does pray.* "That thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Many things are denominated evil to which our Lord had no reference, such as poverty, affliction, &c. He refers either to Satan, the evil one, or to sin, or to both.

(1.) *Christians are in danger from sin.* No man is impeccable. St. Paul found it necessary to keep his body

under. In danger of being robbed of comfort, of purity, of strength, of salvation. (2.) It is the will of Christ that they should be kept from it. His precepts, his promises, his example, his reproofs, his admonitions, the whole nature and tendency of his gospel establish this. (3.) Christians cannot keep themselves from sin. Many have presumed on the strength of their own virtue. Peter was a striking example of this kind. Many have copied his example, and, like him, have fallen. The corruptions of the human heart, and the powers of darkness, are an overmatch for the unaided Christian. (4.) But God can keep them. He knows how to keep them, for his knowledge is infinite. He can keep them, for his power is omnipotent. He will keep them, for he loves and delights to save them.

CONCLUSION.

1. Let us not lose our time by vainly thinking how we would serve God, could we retire from the world.

2. Let us not unnecessarily mix with the children of this world.

3. Let neither persecution, nor temptation, nor sin depress us; for Christ prays for us, and he cannot pray in vain.

OMEGA.

LXXXVI. THE INTENTION OF THE GOSPEL.

JOHN XX. 30, 31.

"And many other things truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

ONE of the greatest benefits enjoyed by man is the faculty of speech; through which, by means of a few articulate sounds,

we easily put each other in possession of subjects of the highest importance; and, if we please, convey to our friends all the information we ourselves enjoy. And as this faculty is so valuable, because its exercise serves to impart information, apprise of danger, point out advantages, or stimulate to a pursuit of those advantages, so we have reason to be thankful for those methods which have been invented to record events, and so to embody the conceptions of the mind as to make them permanent. In order to this, and to guard against the treachery of memory, the practice of writing is often highly useful, in respect even of things that may fall under our own notice, and for which we may have occasion at some future time. But the advantage is more apparent when we refer to events which equally concern persons in different places, and in different ages of the world. Oral tradition is liable to corruption by more than the weakness of human memory; for while, on the one hand, forgetfulness may make large deductions from the truth, invention, on the other, may add falsehoods; and thus adulterate with error the truth which yet remains. The benefit of writing, or of printing, which is a correct and expeditious method of copying what has been written, is however most apparent when the matter thus recorded is of the greatest importance. And, on this ground, we, as Christians, should be peculiarly grateful; that notwithstanding our divine Redeemer did many things "which are not written in this book," yet so many things are recorded, that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ," &c. Let us attend, therefore, to the things to which the evangelist refers, and to the ends proposed in recording them.

I. THE THINGS TO WHICH THE EVANGELIST REFERS. "But these things are written." This language might with equal propriety be applied to the events recorded in the following chapter, as to the things written in this. And in fact we have a similar observation, ch. xxi. 24, 25. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the whole of what was written by John, as well as by all the other evangelists, was with the same design. But as the writer seems here to refer particularly to events which took place after our Saviour's resurrection, and as those recorded in this chapter will furnish sufficient matter for our present meditation, we

shall confine ourselves to these, and attend chiefly to four leading facts.

1. *The fact of the Redeemer's resurrection.* Leaving many circumstances connected with this, and which might form subjects of profitable meditation, as tending to prove or to improve it, we may regard the fact itself as a proof of his Messiahship, corroboration of his doctrine, and evidence of the efficacy of his atonement. (1.) *Proof of his Messiahship.* In the sentence and execution of Jesus, this was the case at issue between him and his enemies. He claimed to be "the king of the Jews," though in a sense different from that in which they understood that phrase; while they rejected and crucified him as a vile impostor. Hence that conference recorded in Matt. xxvii. 62—66. Nor does the condition of his disciples appear to have been such as to render this proof either undesirable or unnecessary. They had heard his teachings, seen his holy life, and witnessed his miracles; and they expected some great result of his proceedings. But that their views were widely different from those of divine Wisdom, we have abundant proof in their own confessions and complaints, Luke xxiv. 17—21; and their inquiry, Acts i. 6. Now, if such were their views of their Master's undertaking, we may easily conceive how weak and wavering was their faith when he had apparently fallen under the power of his foes. But the resurrection and subsequent events dissipated their gloomy anxiety, and restored them to more than their former confidence. To this subject Paul refers, Rom. i. 1—4; and Peter in his address, Acts iii. 12—18; and again in his first epistle, ch. i. 3, 4. From hence followed, by consequence, (2.) *Confirmation of his doctrine.* It was in his character of the Messiah that he came to "bear witness of the truth;" and the remarkable fact of his resurrection served to stamp as with the broad seal of heaven every doctrine he had delivered. Instance the doctrine of man's depraved condition, Matt. xv. 18, 19; John iii. 3; the doctrine of divine influence, John iii. 5, 6. The doctrine of justification by faith, John iii. 15, 16; and the efficacy of prayer, Luke xi. 9—13. His resurrection was also, (3.) *Evidence of the efficacy of his atonement.* At the last supper, previous to his death, "he took the cup," and declared that "his blood was shed for many, for the remission of sins." (See

Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.) Paul, in Eph. i. 7, says, "We have redemption through his blood;" and Rom. iv. 24, 25, and v. 6—10, teach us, because of the Saviour's being alive from the dead, to trust in him for pardon and eternal life. We proceed to notice,

2. *The fact of the Redeemer's unaltered affection towards his disciples.* The warm and constant affection of the pious women who attended him, might seem to demand a proper return. But the apostles had acted a very different part, had forsaken or denied him. Yet he gives many a gracious commission to his "brethren," (ver. 17); he still allows them to claim all the privileges of this relation; and, instead of chilling their recreant souls with merited upbraidings, he soothed them with the friendly salutation, "Peace be unto you," &c., ver. 19—22. And he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and is now waiting to say to the returning sinner, yea, to the returning backslider, "Go in peace, and sin no more." This encouragement is heightened by,

3. *The fact of the Redeemer's commission to his disciples.* "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you," ver. 21. (1.) "As," *i. e.* in like manner. In virtue of my commission, "I send you;" thus the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 20; Eph. vi. 20. (2.) "As," *i. e.* for the like purpose, "to preach the gospel," &c., Luke iv. 18, 19. To convince sinners, to proclaim that God is love, and to send them, without delay, to their Father and friend. Penitents, hear and be encouraged; and especially by,

4. *The fact of the Redeemer's wonderfully gracious condescension,* ver. 24—27. The mind of Thomas seems to have been broken down by "manifold temptations, arising from recent occurrences," ver. 25. But Jesus stoops to his condition, and even submits to the terms of the incredulous disciple, ver. 27; Heb. ii. 17, iv. 15. And the effect was every thing that could be wished. It does not appear whether Thomas actually did what the Saviour invited him to do. But he believed, and professed his faith, ver. 28, 29.

II. THE ENDS PROPOSED IN RECORDING THESE THINGS :
—"That ye might believe, and that believing," &c.

1. "*That ye might believe,*" &c. Here is an exhibition of—The Redeemer's power, x. 18, compared with Acts ii.

22—27.—The Redeemer's fidelity. "I must work the works," &c., ix. 4, xx. 21—23.—The Redeemer's tenderness, in the fulfilment of that prophecy, Isa. xl. 11. And the hesitancy and doubts of the disciples only serve to assure us the more firmly of the truth, which was forced upon them by an irresistible weight of evidence.

2. "*That believing ye might have life,*" &c. The condition of sinners is represented by a state of death in several respects, (1.) They are dead as condemned by the law. (2.) Dead as to spiritual apprehensions, feelings, energies, &c. And, (3.) Dead as to title and meetness for endless life. But through "believing in his name," 1. Our sentence of death is reversed, Rom. iii. 24, 25, v. 19. And, 2. We become "quickened," and have suitable views, feelings, &c., Gal. ii. 20; Eph. ii. 1—5. And, 3. This is the preparation for, and the beginning of "life" eternal, John v. 24; Rom. v. 21, vi. 23. Such being the design of this record, it behoves us to receive it with,

1. *Becoming attention.* It is the title-deed of your heavenly estate, &c., therefore "Search the Scriptures," &c., John v. 39.

2. *Becoming gratitude,* for our superior light, Matt. xiii. 17; 1 Pet. i. 10—13.

3. *Becoming devotion,* to God's glory, and our own interests, 2 Pet. i. 11.

ZETA.

LXXXVII. THE AFFLICTIONS AND ADVANCEMENT OF JOSEPH.

Acts vii. 9, 10.

“And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt; but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt, and all his house.”

THE history of Joseph is highly interesting and instructive. Few men ever experienced more of the vicissitudes of the world, the secret but certain workings of Providence in behalf of virtue and piety, and the truth of the sentiment subsequently expressed by an inspired poet, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain,” Psa. lxxvi. 10.

The summary of this history, delivered by the proto-martyr of the Christian church before the Sanhedrim, supplies us with our text, in which we may consider,

I. THE AFFLICTIONS OF JOSEPH—which were caused,

1. *By the envy of the patriarchs.* The word patriarch signifies a chief father, and the sons of Jacob are so denominated, because they were the fathers of the tribes of Israel. Nine of these engaged in a most brutal and iniquitous conspiracy against their brother Joseph. Reuben and Benjamin are excepted from this infamy. The one refused his concurrence to their crime, and the other was absent from their nefarious council. The principle assigned for their conduct is “envy,” a tormenting and malignant sensation, arising from a survey of the prosperity and excellence of another. The envy of Joseph’s brethren was induced, (1.) By superior virtue. They were most of them bad men: Joseph consented not to their wickedness, but disclosed it to his father, Gen. xxxvii. 2. (2.) By injudicious expressions of paternal partiality, ver. 3. (3.) By certain dreams prophetic of his future elevation, which he in the simplicity of his heart related to his brethren, ver. 5—11.

2. *By the adulterous desires of the wife of Potiphar.* Into a detail of Joseph's temptation from this quarter, delicacy forbids us to enter. The history is contained, Gen. xxxix. 7—12. Disappointed and mortified by Joseph's virtuous resistance, she attempted to ruin him by the basest calumny, ver. 13—18. Who that is acquainted with the fabulous history of the Greeks, does not perceive that Bellerophon the son of Glaucus, and Sthenobœa wife of Prætus, are but corruptions of Joseph the son of Jacob, and the wife of Potiphar: See Classical Dictionary, Art. Bellerophon, and Sthenobœa.

3. *By the ungrateful forgetfulness of Pharaoh's cup-bearer.* This courtier, being disgraced, was placed in the prison in which Joseph was confined, (Gen. xl. 1—3,) who, during his imprisonment, having performed some important services for him, expected to be gratefully remembered upon his reinstatement in royal favour. But who may rely on the promises and professions of a courtier? The air of a court is peculiarly adapted to the growth of selfishness, but not to sincerity, gratitude, and friendship. Two years Joseph continued in prison, because it was not till the close of that period that it suited the cup-bearer's convenience to remember his obligations.

The afflictions of Joseph consisted,

1. *In the incivilities of his brethren.* To such a height had their hatred to him arisen, that, masters of dissimulation as they were, they could not conceal it, even in common conversation. The salutations of friendship, &c. were denied him; they "could not speak peaceably unto him," Gen. xxxvii. 4.

2. *In the loss of his liberty.* For twenty pieces of silver, his inhuman brethren sold him for a slave.

3. *Exile from his home.* The Midianites, to whom he was sold, carried him into a distant land—Egypt, Gen. xxxvii. 28.

4. *False accusation and imprisonment.* Potiphar, the master of Joseph, (and to do him justice, a humane master he was,) being wrought into wrath against the innocent Hebrew, by the calumnies of his wife, thrust him into prison, Gen. xxxix. 20. We can hardly conceive of circumstances more afflictive or more calculated to excite despair, than those under which he was placed: hated by

his brethren—sold for a slave—exiled from home—a stranger in a strange land—his reputation destroyed—his master enraged—friendless in prison! And, as he first beheld the walls of his dungeon, might he not with a seeming propriety have deplored the interpositions of Reuben and Judah, at a former period, by which his life was spared to undergo so great suffering?

II. THE ADVANCEMENT OF JOSEPH.

1. "*God was with him.*" His presence will turn slavery into freedom, 2 Cor. iii. 17,—exile into home,—a dungeon into a palace.

"Should heaven command me to the farthest verge
Of the green earth;—
——'Tis nought to me;
Since God is ever present, ever felt,
In the void waste, as in the city full;
And where he vital breathes, there must be joy."

Joseph's God was with him in the house of his master, Gen. xxxix. 2; in prison, ver. 21, 23, granting him patience, support, consolation, and happiness.

2. God "*delivered him out of all his afflictions,*" as we shall see in the sequel.

3. God "*gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh.*" Pharaoh had been disturbed by certain dreams, which the magicians of Egypt could not explain, Gen. xli. 1—8. His cup-bearer now mentions Joseph, and details some occurrences, which transpired during his disgrace, to which we have already adverted, ver. 9—13. Joseph was consequently sent for; God "*gave him favour:*" and being properly attired, and introduced into the royal presence, Pharaoh tells him that he has heard of his intelligence in the interpretation of dreams, ver. 14, 15. Joseph refers all such knowledge to the communications of God, ver. 16. The dreams are now related, ver. 17—24. God "*gave him wisdom,*" and he interprets them, as prophetic of seven years' plenty, and subsequently seven years' famine in the land of Egypt, and advises for the provision necessary under such circumstances, verses 25—36.

4. *Pharaoh made him governor over Egypt, and all his house*, Gen. xli. 37—41. Now all his former circumstances of depression were reversed. Instead of being

hated, he is loved and admired by all. Instead of being in poverty and slavery, he is the second in Egypt for power and wealth. Instead of the garments and chains of imprisonment, he is clothed in vestures of fine linen, and a gold chain is placed round his neck. Instead of exile and destitution, he has a home, friends, and family connexions. Honour, acclamation, and obeisance attend him, through all the populous and extensive country of Egypt, ver. 42—52. Opportunities were afforded him for retaliating on his brethren, and his retaliation was noble. He saved their lives, and gave them food and possessions in the season of famine. (See Gen. xlii. to xlvii. 12.) Joseph's political conduct has been censured by some, and applauded by others. That he acted with integrity as the servant of the king, is undeniable. Let every unprejudiced man form his own opinion from the history, Gen. xlvii. 13—26. See Dr. A. Clarke's commentary on this passage.

REMARKS.

1. *A striking analogy exists between Joseph and Jesus.*—Was Joseph the object of hatred? So was Jesus, John i. 11; vii. 7; xv. 18, 24, 25.—Was Joseph sold? So was Jesus, Zech. xi. 12; Matt. xxvi. 14, 15. Was the many-coloured garment of Joseph seized by his enemies? So was the seamless robe of Jesus, Ps. xxii. 18; John xix. 23, 24.—Was Joseph a servant? So was Jesus, Matt. xx. 28; Mark x. 45; Phil. ii. 7.—Did Joseph procure vast advantages for many? Jesus did more, he was the Saviour of the world, Matt. i. 27; xviii. 11; Luke xix. 10; John iii. 17; iv. 42; xii. 47; Acts iv. 12; 1 Tim. i. 15; Heb. v. 9.—Did Joseph, through much degradation, arrive at great glory? So did Jesus, Phil. ii. 8—11; Heb. ii. 9; xii. 2.

2. *Affliction is no proof of divine displeasure*, Job v. 17; Ps. xxxiv. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 32; 2 Cor. iv. 17; Heb. xii. 5—7; 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

3. *Virtue invariably secures the presence and protection of God, and will ultimately be rewarded.* The climax of human misery is often the crisis of God's interposition. See the history of Job—of Daniel—of the three Hebrew children, &c.

LXXXVIII. THE PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH AFTER SAUL'S CONVERSION.

ACTS ix. 31.

"Then had the churches rest throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

SAUL of Tarsus was a violent and cruel persecutor. He consented to the death of Stephen, and afterwards "made havoc of the church, entering into every house; and haling men and women, committed them to prison," chap. viii. 3. But after his conversion to Christianity, the churches had rest, and enjoyed high prosperity. There was at that time another cause of repose to the churches of the saints. Dr. Lardner says, it 'might be occasioned by the general alarm which was given to the Jews, when Petronius, by the order of Caligula (incensed by some affront said to be offered him by the Alexandrian Jews), attempted to bring the statue of that emperor among them, and to 'set it up in the Holy of Holies;' a horrid profanation, which the whole people deprecated with the deepest concern in the most solicitous and affectionate manner.' On the words of our text we make the following observations:—first, the churches enjoyed a sweet interval of rest from persecution;—secondly, they wisely improved that happy interval;—and, thirdly, they were multiplied.

I. THE CHURCHES ENJOYED A SWEET INTERVAL OF REST FROM PERSECUTION.

1. The persecution which the churches had endured was unprovoked. They had injured no man; they had insulted no man; they had transgressed no law of civil society; but had conducted themselves peaceably and quietly on all occasions.

2. Yet they had been persecuted with cruelty. Their

enemies, under the influence of their own wicked hearts, and instigated by the devil, had driven them from their habitations; had beaten them with stripes, and had cast them into prisons, chap. viii. 1—3, ix. 1.

3. But they still maintained the Christian doctrines; cultivated the Christian temper; and were careful to maintain good works. This rest was not obtained by sinful compliances, by mean artifices, or any dereliction of principle.

4. Nor was it brought about by any saving change in the hearts of their enemies. Ignorant and wicked men are always opposed to wisdom and righteousness; and when opportunity serves, they are always ready to persecute the church of God, Rom. viii. 7.

5. The rest of the churches was the effect of divine interposition. Saul was converted, and the persecuting Jews were engaged in things which immediately concerned themselves. God overruled these events for the good of his people, Rom. viii. 28.

6. Rest from persecution, even for a short interval, is matter of thankfulness to God. Then we enjoy the means of grace; we have opportunities of improving each other; we have fewer temptations to apostacy; and we can promote the cause of Christ in the world.

II. THE REST WHICH THE CHURCHES ENJOYED WAS WISELY IMPROVED.

1. *They were edified.* To edify, from *ædifico*, signifies to build, to erect, or to carry on a building. The church is the building of God, 1 Cor. iii. 9. And the members of the church are edified when they are built upon their most holy faith, Jude 20. Christ is the foundation of the church, 1 Cor. iii. 11. He is the foundation of our faith in his doctrines; the foundation of our obedience in his commands; and the foundation of our hope in his atonement, intercession, and promises. There is no other foundation on which we can build with safety; but we stand securely on him, both in life and in death; and while he is our rock, the gates of hell cannot prevail against us, Matt. xvi. 18. Evangelical ministers are builders of God's house, 1 Cor. iii. 10. They edify believers, or build them up in knowledge, in faith, and in purity; and by their instrumentality, the spiritual building rises gradually, and in fair propor-

tions, until the head-stone thereof is brought forth with shoutings, crying "Grace, grace unto it," Zech. iv. 7.

2. *The churches walked in the fear of the Lord.* That fear was filial. They had received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cried, Abba, Father, Rom. viii. 15. And as adopted children they revered, loved, and obeyed the Lord. They were afraid of grieving him whom they adored, and they were afraid of injuring that cause which they had espoused. They walked in the fear of the Lord: that fear influenced their tempers and conduct, their words and works. Those who walk in the fear of the Lord, hate and "abhor that which is evil," Ps. xcvi. 10; Rom. xii. 9. They flee from sin of every kind and degree, as "from the face of a serpent," Rev. xii. 14. And they follow after that "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. They set the Lord always before them, in his majesty, glory, and purity; and continually stand in awe of him, as the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, Ps. iv. 4, xvi. 8.

3. *They walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.* True believers enjoy real comfort. This is materially different from that of carnal men. That is light and airy; this is solid and substantial: that is low and grovelling; this is high and exalted: that is but for a moment; this is eternal. The extraordinary operations of the Holy Ghost comforted the church. His miraculous gifts proved the truth of Christianity, stopped the mouths of gainsayers, and won many to Christ. The churches had satisfactory proofs, in his gifts and operations, that God, the Almighty God, was with them; and that the cause of Christ would finally triumph over error and sin. But the Holy Ghost, in his ordinary influences, was a source of comfort to the churches of Jesus; and will continue to be a source of comfort to them, down to the end of time. The kingdom of God, which has been set up among men, is "joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. xiv. 17. That Holy Spirit comforts Christians by his divine illuminations, by his purifying operations, and by the strength which he affords to them who do and suffer the will of God, John xvi. 13; 2 Thess. ii. 13; Eph. iii. 16.

III. DURING THAT REST THEY WERE MULTIPLIED.

1. *New churches were formed in many places.* The apostles

were not interrupted, as they had been, in their itinerant labours; and under those favourable circumstances, they urged their way forward, and carried the gospel into every place where there was an open door.

2. *It is highly probable, also, that multitudes were added to those churches which had been already formed.* The word of God was heard by many who durst not hear when persecution raged; the fine effects of Christianity were more generally seen, and more generally understood, than they could be in times of persecution; and the holy influences of the blessed Spirit of God were more generally felt: so that many became obedient to the faith, Rom. i. 5, xvi. 26.

3. *By these additions the churches prospered.* They acquired strength, they became more courageous, their respectability increased, and their influence was more powerful. The multiplication of churches and members, in those ages, was rapid, and truly astonishing; but "it was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes," Ps. cxviii. 23.

INFERENCES.

1. The gospel carried forward its conquests without noise, and without the force of arms. It was the power of God unto salvation, Rom. i. 16.

2. External peace should be carefully improved. We now enjoy this blessing. Let us improve it.

3. Storms may arise again in this lower world, but there is a rest in heaven for the people of God, Heb. iv. 9.

SIGMA.

LXXXIX. THE BENEVOLENT CONDUCT OF JESUS IS WORTHY OF IMITATION.

ACTS x. 38.

“Who went about doing good.”

THE Lord Jesus Christ, our adorable Saviour, had glory with the Father before the world was; but he laid aside that glory, and came into our world on an errand of love, John xvii. 5. But how did he spend his time on earth? Very little is known of his early life. The whole of what is recorded on that subject may be summed up in a few particulars; he was strong in spirit; he was filled with wisdom; the grace of God was upon him; when he was twelve years old, he sat in the temple with the Jewish doctors, and asked questions which astonished all who heard him; he was obedient to his parents; and he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man, Luke ii. 40—52. But after he entered on his public ministry, to which he had been anointed by the Holy Ghost, he went about doing good, Matt. iii. 16, 17. Let us consider his conduct in the walks of life,—and endeavour to imitate him.

I. THE CONDUCT OF JESUS. He “went about doing good.”

1. Jesus did good to the *bodies* of men. He opened the eyes of the blind; he enabled the lame to walk; he cleansed the lepers; he gave hearing to the deaf; and he raised the dead, Matt. xi. 5. Those miracles were truly benevolent; they promoted human comfort; and, perhaps, may be considered as emblems of those spiritual blessings which are bestowed on all true believers: whether they are designed to be viewed in this light or not, certain it is that they point out the saving power of our glorious Redeemer.

2. He did good to the *souls* of men. The ignorant were instructed by him in the essential doctrines and duties of religion, Matt. v. 1, 2; Luke xix. 47; John viii. 2. He reproved the guilty and warned the careless, that they

might amend their ways and turn to God by true repentance, Matt. xxiii. 13—31. He preached good tidings unto the meek; he bound up the broken hearted; he proclaimed liberty to the captives; and the opening of the prison to them who were bound, Isa. lxi. 1. He strengthened the weak and wavering, and comforted mourning penitents, Matt. v. 4, xi. 28.

3. Our Lord *went about* doing good. He was an itinerant preacher. When persons in want applied to him for special blessings, he granted their requests, and sent them away rejoicing. But he did not wait for such applications. He went forth, with the finest feelings of pure benevolence and love, to seek and to save that which was lost, Luke xix. 10. And to accomplish his merciful designs, he frequently visited large and populous places, and places of public resort.

4. The motives of our Lord, in doing good, were *pure and perfect*. He was moved by the transcendent goodness of his nature to acts of kindness; the pressing wants and painful sufferings of men excited his pity and tender compassion; and all his works were directed to the glory of his Father, John xiii. 4. How widely different are the motives of many, in the exercise of charity, from those of our blessed Saviour! They seek the praise of men; he sought the honour of God: and they aim at their own glory; but he at his creatures' good: they are partial to a few; but he was good to all.

5. Jesus *persevered* in doing good. It was his constant employment, and he was never weary of it. Even when he hung upon the cross, he prayed for his murderers, and saved the penitent thief, Luke xxiii. 34—43. And his death on the accursed tree, where he suffered as a sacrifice for sin, was an act of sublime and unparalleled love.

6. In all the works, and in all the ways of our Saviour, *his lovely temper and amiable conduct shone with resplendent glory*. How unlike the renowned conquerors and tyrants of the world, whose glory has been acquired by blood and slaughter! Nothing exalts the human character more than acts of disinterested benevolence; but Jesus was more than human. He was God and man; and yet it is the temper of the man Christ Jesus which we now contemplate.

II. WE SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO IMITATE THE CONDUCT OF JESUS.

1. *That we may do so, let us study the character and conduct of our great Exemplar.* To this end we should carefully read his public and private discourses, examine his temper, and weigh his conduct. There are three infallible sources of information on this subject: the ancient prophecies; the holy gospels; and the apostolical epistles. The prophets foretold his character; the evangelists have recorded it with artless simplicity; and the apostles, who knew him well, have confirmed the whole. By this course of study we should gain a clear, correct, and complete knowledge of the temper and conduct of our Lord.

2. *But those who copy after his blessed example, must have the mind which was in him,* Phil. ii. 5. Without this, there can be no successful imitation of his conduct; for the source of outward action is in the inner man. To have his mind, we must be born again of the Spirit of God, John iii. 3. All who are born from above, receive those principles of grace which produce every thing that is excellent in the conduct of man. They are new creatures in Christ Jesus, and grace reigns in their hearts: they are influenced in all things by real goodness; by soft pity and tender compassion to the wretched; and by an ardent desire to promote the honour and glory of God.

3. *Having acquired the mind of Jesus, let us endeavour to imitate his conduct.* We cannot imitate his miracles; the attempt would be presumption; but we should endeavour to copy his benevolent actions. Particularly, let us go about, as far as opportunity may serve, to seek the sons and daughters of affliction; when we find them in their wretched abodes, let us pity them; and there let our pity be shewn in acts of kindness. Feed the hungry; clothe the naked; instruct the ignorant; comfort mourners; visit the sick, the prisoner, the fatherless, and the widow. Jesus will reward these works as if they were done to himself, Matt. xxv. 40.

4. *Let us proceed in these works of love, as the Lord may enable us.* More than this is not required; and less than this will not be accepted. The means of some are limited; but they must do what they can. Others abound in means; let these proceed on a liberal plan. It is recorded of the woman who anointed the head of Jesus, "she hath done what she could," Mark xiv. 8. No person will perish who

does what he can. It was the opinion of pious Matthew Henry, that ‘there is not a damned sinner in hell, but if he had done well, as he might have done, had been a glorified saint in heaven.’ Note on Gen. iv. 7.

5. *This conduct will please the Lord, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works*, Ps. cxlv. 9. He blesses us that we may be a blessing, Gen. xii. 2. This conduct accords with the spirit of the gospel, which breathes pure benevolence, and introduces “peace on earth, and good will towards men,” Luke ii. 14; it resembles the employment of angels, who come down from heaven, on errands of love to the heirs of salvation, Heb. i. 14; and has been practised by the greatest and best of men in all ages.

INFERENCES.

1. In the world, and in the visible church, we have many bad examples; but we must not follow a multitude to do evil, Exod. xxiii. 2.

2. There are a few in the church who may be followed in some things; but whatever their excellences are, we cannot safely follow them in all their ways.

3. But we have a perfect example in the conduct of our Saviour; and we are bound by the most sacred ties to walk in his steps, 1 Pet. ii. 21. May the Lord enable us to do so, for his name and mercies sake!

SIGMA.

XC. THE FAITHFUL MINISTER.

ACTS xx. 27.

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

THE apostle Paul spent about three years at Ephesus, and laboured there in the word and doctrine of Jesus Christ, with great success, ver. 31, chap. xix. 17—20. He addressed the words of our text to the elders of the Ephesian

church, having sent for them to meet him at Miletus. They knew the manner of his life, and the matter of his preaching. He was now about to leave them; and it was certain that they would see his face no more in the flesh. But he could appeal to them, on that mournful occasion, that he had not "shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God." But what are we to understand by the counsel of God?—How did the apostle Paul declare it?—And what are the results?

I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE COUNSEL OF GOD?

1. The word counsel signifies advice. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ said to the angel of the church of Laodicea, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire," Rev. iii. 18. And Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor," Dan. iv. 27. The counsel of God is infinitely wise; it is perfectly safe; and it is always acceptable to good men.

2. By the counsel of God we sometimes understand his secret purposes and decrees; which, however mysterious to men, are always just and right, Ps. xcvi. 2. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever," Ps. xxxiii. 11. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure," Isa. xli. 10. "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done," Acts iv. 27, 28. These secret purposes and decrees are worthy of God; they are founded on infinite wisdom and goodness; they are calculated to promote the divine glory and the good of the universe; and they will stand, and be carried into effect, to the end of time.

3. The counsel of God, to which the apostle refers in the words of our text, is the gospel of God our Saviour; or a revelation of the divine will concerning the way of salvation, by the incarnation, death, and intercession of Jesus. This counsel the Pharisees and lawyers rejected against themselves, Luke vii. 30. Here we may observe the following things:—the blessed gospel is a manifestation of divine wisdom; a manifestation of divine truth; and a

manifestation of divine love, 1 Cor. i. 22—24; Heb. x. 26; John iii. 16. It teaches all things which are necessary to be known; commands all things which are necessary to be done; and promises all things which are necessary for both time and eternity. Paul declared this counsel to the Ephesians, and to all the churches of the saints, where he was called to preach; and he declared it to the world at large, agreeably to the commission which was given by Christ to all his apostles, Mark xvi. 15.

II. BUT HOW DID THE APOSTLE DECLARE THE COUNSEL OF GOD?

1. That which he declared was the counsel of God. He taught what God had revealed to the prophets; what he had spoken by his Son; and what was revealed to himself, Acts xxvi. 22; Heb. i. 1—3; 1 Cor. ii. 13. Some teach the counsel of men. It is said of the Jews, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," Matt. xv. 9. And there are some in our day, who teach nothing but what they find in creeds, articles of religion, liturgies, and homilies. These contain many good things, and may be read with profit; but the word of God is the only standard of doctrine and duty. Human councils and human creeds have been fruitful sources of error; but the holy Scriptures, having God for their author, are perfectly correct, and are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. iii. 16.

2. The apostle Paul declared all the counsel of God. He kept nothing back which was profitable, ver. 20. A partial gospel is unprofitable. Some declare nothing but doctrines and nice distinctions; but these are only a part of God's counsel: others perpetually dwell on duties; but these are only a part of this counsel: and others are always declaring Christian experience; but this is only a part of the counsel of God. He who declares all the counsel, sweetly unites doctrines, duties, and experience, in all his public and private ministrations. He says all that God has bid him say, whether it be pleasing or painful; and brings forward, at proper times, all the promises and all the threatenings of the gospel. Thus sinners are warned; mourners are comforted; believers are edified; and backsliders are restored to the Shepherd and Bishop of their

souls, Col. i. 28; Matt. xi. 28; 2 Cor. xii. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 25.

3. He had not *shunned to declare all the counsel of God*. Ministers of the gospel should be diligent, and proceed in their work, whatever difficulties lie in the way. The apostle Paul had many difficulties; but he urged his way forward through them all. He might have shunned his duty through indolence; for preaching was a laborious work: he might have shunned it through shame; for the gospel was despised: he might have shunned it through fear; for persecution raged with violence: he might have shunned it through covetousness; for preaching was not a lucrative employment in those days: but none of these things moved him, neither did he count his life dear unto himself, that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God, ver. 24. A faithful minister is supported in his work by the grace of God, and his reward is from the Lord. He cannot live without food and raiment; but these are provided, and he is content, 1 Tim. vi. 8.

III. THE EFFECTS PRODUCED BY PAUL'S PREACHING.

1. *The ignorant were instructed*. They were turned from darkness to light, chap. xxvi. 18. Paul taught them the necessity of repentance towards God; and of faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, ver. 20. Their sins, both of heart and life, rendered repentance absolutely necessary; and by faith they received Jesus as the Messiah, who came to make atonement for sin, and to save a perishing world.

2. *Believers were edified*. This was the end which the apostle had kept in view, when he preached to them in public, and when he visited them from house to house; and when he departed he commended both the elders and the church to God, and the word of his grace, which was able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them who are sanctified, ver. 20—32.

3. *The mind of the apostle was easy and happy*: for he was pure from the blood of all men, ver. 26. If any perish, through ministerial neglect, God will require their blood at the hands of his messengers; and, therefore, they should be careful to declare all the counsel of God. Happy is the faithful minister, and happy are the people who are placed under his care.

4. *Jesus was honoured by the preaching of the apostle Paul.* He set him forth in all his personal glories ; in all his gracious purposes and designs ; in all his merciful undertakings ; in all his pure doctrines ; in all his holy commands ; in all his precious promises ; and in all his awful threatenings.

5. *Many souls were saved by the ministry of Paul.* They were brought to repentance, and to an acknowledgment of the truth, 2 Tim. ii. 25 ; they were begotten again unto the Lord, 1 Cor. iv. 15 ; they had received forgiveness of sins, chap. xxvi. 18 ; they were cleansed from sin, 1 Cor. vi. 11 ; and they were filled with the Spirit.

6. But notwithstanding these wonderful effects, *some mocked and others blasphemed*, Acts xvii. 32, xiii. 45. And while his word was to some the savour of life unto life, it was to others the savour of death unto death, 2 Cor. ii. 16. On the whole, let us bless God for a faithful and an enlightened ministry ; let us carefully improve it to the best of purposes ; and may it be continued to us and to our children ! Amen.

SIGMA.

XCI. A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

Acts. xxiv. 16.

“ And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”

THE Jews charged the apostle Paul with high crimes, and employed Tertullus, an orator, to bring accusations against him before Felix the governor. Tertullus flattered Felix, and abused Paul ; but produced no proof of guilt in the holy apostle. The answer of Paul was manly, correct, and convincing. He had nothing to fear. His conduct had been pious and circumspect ; for he had exercised himself “ to have always a conscience void of offence both toward God

and men."—But what is implied in a conscience void of offence?—And how should we exercise ourselves to have such a conscience?

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE?

1. *Conscience is the secret testimony of the soul, whereby it approves things that are good, and condemns those that are evil.* A good conscience is purified by the blood of Christ, 1 Tim. i. 5; Heb. ix. 14. An evil conscience is loaded with guilt, Heb. x. 22. And a hardened conscience does not feel the evil of sin, 1 Tim. iv. 2. Conscience has a rule of action; it compares action with that rule, and draws inferences from the comparison.

2. *To have a conscience void of offence, three things are necessary:—*First, a good rule of conduct; secondly, an impartial comparison of our conduct with that rule; and thirdly, a conviction that there has been a conformity of conduct to our rule. In that case, conscience does not charge us with wilful crimes; but assures us of innocence and rectitude. Advocates for sin, whether professors or profane, will not allow that any man has a conscience void of offence, but surely the grace of God is sufficient to keep us from all sin, 1 Cor. xv. 34.

3. *That man who has a conscience void of offence towards God is inwardly pious, and practises all the duties of piety.* He believes in God, Heb. xi. 6; he fears God, Psalm cxxviii. 1; he loves God, Matt. xxii. 37, 38; he prays to God, Phil. iv. 6; he trusts in God, Isa. xxvi. 4; he praises God, Isa. xii. 1; and he worships God in spirit and in truth, John iv. 24. These are the principal duties of piety; and when we engage in them with true sincerity, we have a conscience void of offence towards God.

4. *He who has a conscience void of offence towards men, carefully follows two rules:—*First, he injures no man, either in his person, in his property, or in his character; and, secondly, he does all the good which is in his power to every man with whom he is connected, both in word and deed. He loves all men, he prays for all, and he is ready to forgive injuries and insults. While he walks humbly with his God, he is careful to do justly to men, and is ever ready to exercise mercy, Mic. vi. 8.

II. HOW SHOULD WE EXERCISE OURSELVES TO HAVE A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE?

1. Let us use those means by which we may *obtain an enlightened conscience*, that we may understand our duty both to God and men. To this end carefully examine the word of God, which is the only safe guide of human conduct. Without this blessed book, we fall into error and sin; we dishonour God and injure men; and vainly imagine that we are doing what is fit and right. Thus Saul thought it right to do many things against the church: but he did those things in ignorance and unbelief, Acts xxvi. 9; 1 Tim. i. 13.

2. It should be an invariable rule with us, to *do nothing at any time, or under any circumstances, contrary to the dictates of conscience*. When we act contrary to our views of things, we are self-condemned. If the conscience be not sufficiently enlightened, we should not venture to act against its warnings. Every one should be persuaded in his own mind that what he does is right; for if this be not the case, he cannot be guiltless before the Judge of all the earth. Whatsoever men do, without a conviction of its lawfulness, is sin to them; for whatsoever is not of faith is of sin, Rom. xiv. 22, 23.

3. In this holy exercise we should *abstain from the appearance of evil*; for if we yield to any thing which our own mind condemns, or to any thing which appears evil in the eyes of wise and good men, we shall soon fall into great and gross sins, 1 Thess. v. 22. For this reason we should steadily follow what we deem to be right, even in little things; and scrupulously avoid evil of every kind and degree. If this rule be constantly followed, we shall seldom deviate from the path of duty.

4. That we may keep a conscience void of offence, let us *be careful not to enter into temptation*. We may be tempted to evil without our own consent, and without sin; but if we enter into it, we become guilty before God. We should resist the first attack of an enemy. Temptation when first presented to the mind is generally weak, and we are strong; but its strength increases and ours diminishes, when we enter into it. For this reason we should not enter into it at all, lest we be overcome in an evil hour, Matt. xxvi. 41.

5. As a further help in this important work, *let us be vigilant*. We are surrounded by enemies, who are ready to seize every favourable moment to draw us from our duty.

Let us look out for them, that we may not be taken by surprise. Watch against all evil, whether inward or outward : watch for opportunities of doing good ; and watch for the coming of Jesus to judge the world. The admonition of our Lord will never be out of season, " What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch," Mark xiv. 38.

6. To watchfulness let us add *prayer*. Let us pray for wisdom to conduct us safely through difficult circumstances, James i. 5. Let us pray for courage and strength, that we may be able to overcome all evil ; and for that comfort and consolation which may be necessary for us in our trials and temptations. He who is always in the spirit of prayer, cannot live in any known sin ; and for this reason, " let us pray without ceasing," 1 Thess. v. 17.

7. It is essentially necessary, in this blessed exercise, to *avoid secret sins*. These are fully known to God, Psalm xc. 8. He will bring them into judgment, Eccles. xii. 14. Secret sins lead to open wickedness ; and he who sins in the dark will soon transgress in open day. No man who lives in secret sin, whatever his pretensions are, has a conscience void of offence. And his sin, though artfully concealed from men, will be sure to find him out, Num. xxxii. 23.

8. While we set God before us, in his justice and purity, and in his awful majesty and glory, we shall be careful to keep a conscience void of offence. This is our duty and our privilege, Gen. xvii. 1 ; Ps. xvi. 8. His eyes are constantly upon us, and he hates all evil. Our love to him produces an hatred of evil ; and if our love be without dissimulation, we shall abhor and detest it, Ps. xcvi. 10 ; Rom. xii. 9.

9. Let us *be conversant with death and judgment*. These are solemn subjects ; they should occupy our thoughts in the morning when we awake ; throughout the day, when we are engaged in business ; and in the evening, when we retire to rest. While this is the case, we shall be careful neither to offend God, nor to injure man.

10. And lastly, *we should exercise ourselves daily in meditations on the happiness of heaven, and the torments of hell*. There is a heaven of light and glory for good men ; and there is a hell of darkness and shame for the wicked, Rev. xxi. 23 ; Ps. ix. 17. He who has a good conscience, is

an heir of immortal blessedness ; but he whose conscience is loaded with guilt, is an heir of death and hell, Rom. vi. 23. Serious reflections on these subjects will keep us from sin.

INFERENCES.

1. While we keep a conscience void of offence, *we enjoy the approbation of God*, and are happy in his love, Ps. xi. 7.

2. When this is the case, our minds are at rest, and we enjoy that peace which passeth all understanding, Phil. iv. 7.

3. This takes away the fear of man, which brings a snare to the soul ; and enables us to look every one in the face without a blush of guilt.

4. And while the conscience is void of offence, we are holy, happy, and useful, and all things go well with us both for time and eternity, Isa. iii. 10. May we all enjoy this invaluable blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SIGMA.

XCII. THE CORINTHIANS BESOUGHT NOT TO RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

2 CORINTHIANS vi. 1.

“ We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

It was observed by a justly celebrated divine of the church of England, that ‘ the wildest opinion that ever was entertained in matters of religion, is more rational than unconcern about those matters. Upon this subject nothing is so absurd as indifference ; no folly so contemptible as thoughtlessness and levity.’ Seriousness and thoughtfulness are essential to godliness : and never were there more

serious men upon earth, than the apostles of our God and Saviour. They were 'serious, in a serious cause.' Foolish talking, and corrupt communication, they invariably discountenanced both by precept and example; and with tears, temptations, bitterness of spirit, and deep death-like seriousness they were habitually familiar. Nor was this seriousness exerted solely on their own account; they were 'much impressed themselves, and conscious of their awful charge, and anxious mainly that the flocks they fed might feel it too.' How powerful were their appeals! How affectionate their addresses! How deeply were they concerned to promote the eternal salvation of those among whom they lived and laboured! The text is sufficiently indicative of this: "We then as workers," &c. Contempt of God's word and commandments is a crime awfully prevalent in all Christian countries; this passage therefore cannot be uninteresting to us. The topics of the text are,—the grace of God,—the receiving of it in vain,—the character of ministers,—and the deep concern they feel for the souls of the people of their charge.

I. THE GRACE OF GOD. Few words have a greater extent of application than the word grace. It is sometimes a title, or prayer; it is applied to adventitious or artificial beauty; it designates particular virtues; it signifies the favourable regard of God, or his holy influence upon the mind. In the text it means the gospel. Consider,

1. *The source whence it proceeds.* This system of revealed truth, which we call the gospel, emanated from God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," &c. Had God dealt with man according to his demerit, had every transgression received its just recompense of reward, the volume of inspiration had never been spread before our eyes. But because God is gracious, we have a gospel, and the gospel is the pure effect of grace.

2. *The discoveries it makes.* It proceeds upon the principle that man is a sinner, deserving damnation; that destruction and misery are in his ways; that he is morally incapable of restoring himself to the forfeited favour of his God. But the gospel brings to man gracious discoveries of light for darkness, pardon for guilt, redemption for his bondage, and blessings infinitely diversified, according to the multiplied miseries of men, and all of grace.

3. *The assistance it affords.* The law was a system of rigour; the eternal Legislator, in giving it, manifested himself in all the magnificence of infinite majesty; and published it amidst thunders and flames of fire; and at length wrote it with his immortal finger on tables of stone. This law demanded constant obedience; it required man to love God through all the periods of his existence; and with all the intensity, and vigour, and capacity of his mind; and it cursed him with a bitter curse if he offended even in one point. But it made no provision to enable him to do his duty. It found no place for repentance;—it held out no hope of mercy. But the gospel is the grace of God; it invites man to a throne of grace; offers him the spirit of grace; communicates grace suited to his exigencies, and proportioned to his day.

4. *The rewards it promises.* The rewards of eternity surpass all description. God's heaven is indescribably glorious. There is a freedom from all evil, and all possibility of evil; and an undisturbed, and an endless possession of all that can ennoble, elevate, and felicitate the human spirit. And all of grace.—Man deserves it not; he can have no claim to it on the ground of justice; for in the course of justice none of us can see salvation. Eternal life is the reward of grace.

II. THE GRACE OF GOD MAY BE RECEIVED IN VAIN. Receiving the grace of God, or the gospel, according to the sense of the text, is hearing it, frequenting the ministry of it, professing faith in it, &c. We receive it in vain,

1. *When we do not understand it.* No man can profit by what he does not understand. The gospel demands the exercise of the understanding. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" said Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not," &c., Matt. xiii. 19.

2. *When we are not convinced by it.* Sin has thrown us into a fatal slumber, a death-like torpor is come upon us; we have hard unfeeling hearts. But when Peter preached the gospel at Jerusalem, his hearers were pricked in their hearts; convictions for sin seized them, and they cried out "Men and brethren," &c. If convictions similar to these have never laid hold on our consciences, we have received the grace of God in vain.

3. *When salvation is not brought to us through it.* God's design in sending us the gospel, is our salvation, Rom. i. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2. It is called the gospel of our salvation, and said to bring salvation; because God makes the preaching of it subservient to the endless salvation of mankind. But he who hears the gospel, and yet continues in his sins, receives it in vain.

4. *When we practically disregard it.* The design of the gospel is to amend our lives, as well as regenerate our hearts. Wherever the apostles preached, they insisted on the absolute necessity of good works; on coming out from among the ungodly; being blameless and harmless; walking in wisdom towards them that were without; adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, &c. Those, therefore, who practically disregard the gospel, who exemplify none of its rules, copy none of its models, nor conform to any of its requisitions, receive it in vain.

III. MINISTERS, AS WORKERS TOGETHER, BESEECH THEIR HEARERS NOT TO RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN. Ministers are workers, not idlers; an idle minister is a standing libel on his profession. 1. Ministers work for themselves. They "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling:" their own vineyards must be cultivated, and their own salvation insured.—2. Ministers work for others. They work in their closets, in their pulpits, and in the chambers of disease. And their work is deeply serious work; they risk their salvation by neglecting it; "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel." And they work with Christ; "workers together with him." "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Ministers are Christ's workmen, and Christ works with them: "They went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them." But the words *with him* are supplied by our translators; so that the sense of the text seems to be, "We then, as joint workers, or fellow labourers, beseech you," &c. This shews that ministers are united in their work, that there is a harmony in their operations, that they have a union of effort. Or it may intimate that ministers are fellow-workers with the people; that preachers and people should go hand in hand. "We beseech you." We have no dominion over your faith. We beseech you. How strange that man should need beseeching, in an affair so deeply interesting;

and still more strange that we have to beseech in vain ! Ministers beseech their hearers,

1. *For God's sake not to receive the gospel in vain.* God has set on foot a wonderful plan for the salvation of his immortal offspring, a plan where all his attributes are gloriously displayed ; a plan which required the sacrifice of his Son, the gift of his Spirit, the ministration of angels, the enacting of laws, and the publication of the gospel ; but all this is lost upon him who receives the gospel in vain. Ministers beseech their hearers,

2. *For their own sakes not to receive the gospel in vain.* By the value of their own souls, souls possessing such amazing powers ; by that heaven which they forego, and that hell which they must endure, if they hear the gospel in vain, they beseech them.

3. *Ministers, for the sake of themselves, beseech sinners not to receive the grace of God in vain.* We know that ministers will be rewarded, even where they are not successful, Isa. xlix. 5. It is not their province to command success. But oh ! it is like death to them to labour in vain, to spend their time, their talents, their energies, and their strength for nought ; to see no fruit of their labours ; to hear none asking "the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward ;" and they say to their hearers, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

In conclusion, the text should lead our readers to inquire, Have we received the grace of God in vain ? Have we more light in our understandings, and more salvation in our hearts, than when we first began to hear the gospel ? And it should excite ministers to inquire, Are we workers in the gospel field ? How do we work ? Do we put our souls in our work ? Do we beseech sinners to be reconciled unto God ? Are we affectionate, but zealous and sincere in our dealings with our hearers ? That we may not hear in vain, nor preach in vain, let us continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

BETA.

XCIH. SINFUL ANXIETY ABOUT WORLDLY THINGS PROHIBITED.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 6.

“Be careful for nothing.”

THAT there is a general indifference among those who profess the Christian religion to the essential and vital duties of it, the faithful performance of which is requisite to secure the interests of their immortal souls, is too evident to be denied. The principal cause of this is, a prevailing concern and anxious solicitude about worldly things : it is this that diverts them from due thoughtfulness about, and serious pursuits of, infinitely better and more worthy objects. By spending all their energies on things of small value, nothing is left behind but lukewarmness for that important object, which deserves and requires their most earnest application : and such an irrational and perilous conduct cannot possibly be grounded on any other foundation, than the wrong notions they entertain both of earthly and heavenly things.

The design of the apostle in the text, is to caution Christians against an inordinate concern about either the good or evil things of this world, that interfere with their present peace, and obstruct their attending to and prosecuting both the present and future advantage of practical religion.

I. EXPLAIN THIS PROHIBITION, OR SHOW HOW IT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

1. *Spiritual and heavenly things are not the objects of this prohibition.* There is no occasion to forbid any carefulness or solicitude about the welfare of the soul, and such qualifications as are necessary for a future state of happiness : but, on the contrary, there is much need to excite all to a diligent use of those means requisite to secure eternal life. And accordingly, there are in the sacred Scriptures many express precepts given relative to this important matter.

(See Eccl. ix. 10; Luke xiii. 24; Rom. xii. 11; Phil. ii. 12; 2 Pet. i. 10, and iii. 14.) The securing the everlasting salvation of the soul requires the utmost watchfulness, diligence, and industry. Our work as Christians is great, our time for performing it is short, the enemies of our happiness are active, and constantly employed against us. We are to seize every proper opportunity for reading the Scriptures, hearing the gospel preached, secret meditation and prayer, and to preserve a holy fervour in these duties. Beloved lusts must be mortified, sensual appetites kept within the bounds of reason and religion, in the presence of the most agreeable and tempting objects. In every thing we must deny ourselves, live by faith in Christ, and direct all our actions to the glory of God. This our work is compared to exercises in which strength is exerted to the utmost, such as running for a prize, wrestling and fighting for the mastery. The apostle, well acquainted with the technicalities used in the celebration of the Olympic games, presses them into the service of the Christian religion, to urge on the attention of Christians the absolute necessity of the greatest care, diligence, and exertion in the work of their salvation. This may convince us, that the most vigorous efforts are necessary, and remissness dangerous: they who are negligent and slothful in such work cannot succeed; nothing is to be more avoided and dreaded in the concerns of the soul than a careless indifference.

2. *It is not all careflessness for the things of this life that is here forbidden, though the prohibition seems to be absolute.* While we are in this world, and every one has a body as a part of his charge, we cannot be exempted from a due concern for it: and God, who has not made us like the angels, free from all occasion for meat, drink, clothing, and other outward conveniences, does not expect that we should, like them, be wholly unaffected with things of that nature. Nay, he has given us precepts obliging us to honest industry, in our respective lawful callings, for the support, sustenance, and welfare of the body, and also the bodies of those of our own charge; for these purposes the fourth commandment enjoined us to labour six days in the week, Exod. xx. 9. The apostle requires us "to provide things honest in the sight of all men," Rom. xii. 17. He reproaches idle persons with the bad character of "disorderly

walkers," and commands that such as would not work, being able, should not eat, 2 Thess. iii. 10—12; and intimates that idleness is a sin against the laws of nature, 1 Tim. v. 8. God has so ordered matters in the course of his providence, that the generality of mankind shall in the sweat of their face eat bread, till they return to the dust, Gen. iii. 19. This is sufficient to shew, that all carefulness for the things of this life is not here prohibited.

3. *We need but add one suggestion more for shewing how this prohibition is to be understood.* It is only anxious, immoderate, distrustful, distracting carefulness about the things of this life, either the enjoying the good things of it, or avoiding the evil, or afflictions, that the apostle forbids, while he says, "Be careful for nothing." The original word in the text, *μεριμνατε*, properly signifies such a care as divides and distracts, and so weakens the mind.

II. REPRESENT THE SINFULNESS AND UNREASONABLENESS OF THAT CAREFULNESS IT FORBIDS.

1. This will appear if we consider that the things we are apt to be over careful about, are exceedingly disproportionate to the nature and capacity of the soul. The soul of man is spiritual and immortal; all the things of this life are material and temporal; they may be of some use to the outward man; but to expect peace of conscience, inward and durable comfort, from any thing the world affords, proves that we are grossly ignorant either of ourselves, of the dignity and excellence of our rational nature, of the design and end of our creation, and of the strength and capacity of our immaterial nature, which can be satisfied with nothing short of the enjoyment of God himself, or of the world about us, to imagine that there is any thing to be had in the circle of vanity that will satisfy our desires.

2. This anxious carefulness about the concerns of this life is unnecessary. For suppose one man had all the earth to himself, he could use no more of its produce than the exigencies of an individual require; and a little would supply these. The apostle therefore says, "having food and raiment, let us be therewith content," 1 Tim. vi. 8. Whatever there is more, we do but behold it with our eyes, Eccles. v. 11; and an empty speculation is a poor pleasure.

3. This carefulness here prohibited is injurious both to

God and ourselves. Anxious solicitude for worldly things has for its cause an immoderate love for them, and that the apostle declares to be inconsistent with the love of God, nay, to be enmity against him, 1 John ii. 15—17; James iv. 4. It is injurious to ourselves, it leaves no room for the concerns of the soul and a future state. He who makes the things of this world his chief aim, and religion his next consideration, if at all, will never cordially embrace the latter, nor can he on right grounds expect a blessing on the former. It exposes us to numerous temptations, and gives Satan great advantages against us. It frequently excites men to the use of unlawful means, and takes them out of God's providential way to accomplish their base ends, or keep themselves out of straits and difficulties. It deprives persons of peace and comfort, fills them with vexation and inward torment, and in its operations shortens that life, the prolonging of which it aims at, 1 Tim. iv. 9, 10.

4. *It is fruitless*; it is of no advantage to us at all. This our Saviour intimates, where he thus argues against it, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" Matt. vi. 27. As if he said, What does all your excessive solicitude amount to, or what are you the better for it? Do your worldly affairs succeed the better? No, they do not; it is certain they always prosper the best when our cares about them are moderate.

5. It is very sinful, evincing great unbelief, or distrust of the ability and willingness of God to take care of us, and manage our temporal affairs for the best. This our Saviour also intimates: "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Matt. vi. 30. And from the 24th verse to the end of this chapter, there are many arguments against this anxious carefulness.

III. DIRECT TO SOME REMEDIES OF IT, OR HELPS AGAINST IT.

1. Let us earnestly seek an interest in God, through Christ, and never cease till we possess all spiritual blessings in heavenly things. When that great point is gained, we shall have a satisfying portion, however little of the things of this life we enjoy; and are secured against divine condemnation and wrath, whatever afflictions and trials may be our lot; and may justly, with Jacob, say, "I have enough,"

Gen. xxxiii. 11; for if God, through Christ, be ours, all things are ours, 1 Cor. iii. 21.

2. Let us labour to have our minds furnished from the holy Scriptures with right views of the nature of earthly enjoyments. They are uncertain; the apostle gives to riches this epithet, 1 Tim. vi. 17. Our Saviour calls all the life "meat which perisheth," John vi. 27. Solomon speaks of them as though they had no existence, and ascribes "wings" to them, Prov. xxiii. 5. They are unsatisfying; therefore Solomon calls them vain, vanity, vanity of vanities, Eccles. i. 2, 14. Daily observation and personal experience confirm the truth of this assertion—they who have the greatest abundance, enjoy the least satisfaction; these things, therefore, deserve comparatively but little of our care.

3. *Let us steadfastly depend on the overruling providence of God* in the faithful discharge of appointed duty. This is frequently required, and of great moment to the purpose in hand. (See Ps. xxxvii. 3, lv. 22; 1 Pet. v. 7.) It is easy with God to supply all the necessities of life, and support them who serve him under all its trials. His wisdom and power are infinite. All the riches and furniture of the world are his, perfectly at his disposal. He has the hearts of all men, even of kings, in his hand, and inclines and disposes them to do good to whom he pleases. And as he is able to do this, so is he willing. Therefore,

4. Get and cultivate *faith in God's promises*. He has been graciously pleased to engage himself, by many express promises, to supply the want of his devoted people with all things needful: and these promises have the support of his unquestionable veracity, and never-failing word. (See Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10, lxxxiv. 11; 1 Tim. iv. 8.)

5. *Be content with what God deems needful for us*, and thinks fit to give. "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have." Heb. xiii. 5. Though our portion of the good things of this life be but small, there is every reason why we should be content and satisfied; because all temporal things being God's property, he may do with his own as he pleases, distribute them to whom, and in what measure he thinks proper: though little, it is more than we deserve, and what infinite wisdom has allotted us.

6. Let us *keep death in view*. We must soon die, and in that day we die, all our worldly enjoyments, and cares about them, perish for ever. The body, as soon as dead, has entirely lost the relish of things once most agreeable. When the rich die, they carry none of their riches with them, Psa. xlix. 17; 1 Tim. vi. 7. And though we could take some of our earthly enjoyments with us into the other world, they would be of no service to us there. A due remembrance of our latter end would be an excellent remedy of anxious carefulness for the things of this life.

Let us *pray for God's blessing on that portion of worldly good he is pleased to afford us*. Prayer is here prescribed as a special means to free our hearts from perplexing cares, and to produce inward peace and quiet. A little with God's blessing will go a great way; hence says the Psalmist, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked," Psa. xxxvii. 16. It is not much that nature needs, and the greatest abundance without the divine blessing could not sustain life, Luke xii. 15. It is not by bread alone that we live, but by the word of blessing that proceeds out of the mouth of God, Matt. iv. 4.

THETA.

XCIV. CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

COLOSSIANS i. 18.

"And he is the head of the body, the church."

THE Colossians had been converted to Christianity chiefly through the instrumentality of Epaphras, who was a minister of Christ, and a fellow-helper with St. Paul. But they were in danger of being seduced from the simplicity of the

gospel by designing or ignorant men. False teachers had crept in among them, who inculcated the worship of angels, abstinence from animal food, the observance of Jewish festivals, the mortification of the body by long-continued fasting, and the conformity to external ceremonies, as necessary to salvation. To all these things the apostle refers in different parts of this epistle. In the preceding verses to the text, he asserts the doctrine of the essential Godhead of Christ; a doctrine which he never overlooks in any of his epistles. Here he states the relation in which Christ stands to his church: "He is the head of the body," &c. Let us,

I. DESCRIBE THE CHURCH. This may at first view seem a needless task. What need of description on a subject so plain? Who does not know what a church is? Have we not one in every parish? But it is with the scriptural, and not the common and corrupted application of the term we have to do. The term church in the New Testament uniformly refers to persons, and never to places. (See Acts xx. 28; Rom. xvi. 5; Gal. i. 22.) But by what marks were the members of the primitive churches designated?

1. *They were a people separated from the world.* The church and the world form two distinct societies. "Ye are not of the world," said Christ to his disciples. Hence believers were charged, "Be not conformed to this world;" and to "have no communion with the unfruitful works of darkness:" and Christianity is the same through all the revolutions of time.

2. *They were a people scorned and grievously persecuted by the world.* Saul made havoc of the church. "Herod stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church." At that time there was a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem; and the members of the church of Christ are still scorned and contemned by the ungodly part of mankind.

3. *They were a people who gave themselves up to the practice of prayer and supplication for themselves and their neighbours.* Christ encouraged his disciples to pray, by telling them that whatsoever they asked in his name, it should be done for them: at Jerusalem they prayed so fervently, that the whole house was shaken where they were assembled. (See Acts xii. 5, xvi. 25.) And the members of Christ's

church still live, and always will live, in the practice of prayer.

4. *They were a people who adorned their high profession by a consistent conduct.* We do not affirm that there were none among them who scandalized their profession, no brother who walked disorderly, no busy-body in other men's matters. Alas! they were plagued with such people, but when detected they were cast out of the church. O how holy were the members of the church of Christ required to be!

II. SHEW WHY CALLED A BODY.

1. *To illustrate the beauty of its moral form.* The human body is the most beautiful structure in the world. Nothing is so much admired. How exquisitely beautiful is the church of Christ! Every member of it has put on Christ, and is invested with his moral image. "The king's daughter is all glorious within," &c. Psa. xlv. 13; Isa. liv. 11—13; Eph. v. 26, 27.

2. *To describe the variety of members of which it is composed.* "We have many members in the same body, but all members have not the same office." The eyes see for the body, the hands handle for the body, the feet walk for the body, the palate tastes for the body, and the nerves feel for the body. In the church there are various members. "God gave, some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists," &c., Eph. iv. 11—14. In the church now, there are many members who hold distinct offices. Some write books, some preach sermons, some serve tables, some visit the sick, &c. Every member is useful; but every member should know his place, and keep it.

3. *To display the harmony and union of all its members.* Who that contemplates his own body, can help being astonished at the union which subsists between all the members of which it is composed? And the church, though composed of many members, is one body, one building, one temple, one flock, one family. There is not a union of circumstances, nor of sentiment; but a union of faith, of affection, and of effort. Disunion in the church the apostles deprecated, and for union they prayed, Eph. iv. 16.

III. ILLUSTRATE THE OFFICE OF CHRIST AS THE HEAD OF THE BODY.

1. *The head is the seat of dignity to the body.* It is above

the body in point of local situation, and it is superior to the body in dignity and authority. And Christ is above all.

2. *The head is the seat of government for the body.* There can be no government where there is no head. Christ has the sole government in his church. The laws by which our conduct is regulated are his laws. The influence by which our sins are subdued is his influence. The account we shall have to give of our conduct is to him, and the retribution we shall receive is from his hand.

3. *The head is the seat of wisdom for the body.* The head thinks for the body, and directs all its movements. And Christ is made unto us wisdom. Without the direction and influence of Christ, we should be no more capable of guiding our steps aright, than a body without a head. Alas ! where did we wander before Christ took us under his direction !

4. *The head is the seat of glory to the body.* Do we not honour the head peculiarly ? And Christ is the glory of his church. We honour Christ by praying to him, praising him, loving him, and trusting him with our all.

5. *The head is the seat of union to the body.* The origin of all sensation and motion is in the nerves, and these proceed from the head, and unite all the parts of the body together. And Jesus Christ unites the members of his mystical body, and makes them all one in himself.

APPLICATION.

1. *Is the church a body ?* Let me then enquire, Have I union with the body ? Am I united to any Christian society ? Why not ? If there were no Christian societies, there would soon be no Christian ministers, no fellowship of saints, and no religion in the land. Why do I not join some Christian society ? Am I holier than the members of which Christian churches are composed ? then they ought to share my counsels and prayers. Am I worse than they ? then self-interest should bind me to cast in my lot among them.

2. *Is the church a body ?* Then what a horrid thing is schism in the body. No man ever hated his own flesh.

To see the members of a body bite and devour one another, how unnatural ! O let us never permit the demon of discord to creep in amongst us !

3. *Is the church the body of Christ ?* Then by helping Christians we help Christ's members. Were Christ again upon earth, and to go about naked and destitute, we should rejoice to render him assistance. But he has his members, many of whom are poor, and afflicted, and forlorn ; and what we do for them, he considers as being done for himself. " Is one member weak ? let us help him. Is another ignorant ? let us instruct him," &c.

4. *Is the church the body of Christ ?* Then will he not terribly punish those who insult his body ? Persecutors will have a horrid hell, Zech. ii. 8 ; Matt. xviii. 6.

5. *Is Christ the head of the body ?* Then what may not Christians expect from him ! What an endearing relation subsists between Christ and believers ! We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. May we grow up into him in all things ! Amen.

BETA.

XCV. SOBRIETY.

1 THESSALONIANS v. 6.

" Let us be sober."

IN the context the apostle exhorts the converts at Thessalonica to a variety of Christian duties, personal and relative, suitable to their state and privileges as Christians in general, and to their belief and expectation of Christ's second coming to judgment in particular. One of these personal duties we have in the text—*sobriety* : and as the apostle deemed it requisite to urge this on

the attention and practice of one of the primitive churches, it is no less applicable to Christian ministers and people in the present day. In speaking of this duty, we shall describe,

I. THE VIRTUE OF SOBRIETY.

1. *This virtue has a principal regard to a man's self, and is equally adapted to persons of all ranks, characters, ages, and sexes.* Speaking generally, it consists in observing those rules, and walking according to those methods, whereby they may secure and preserve their own health, ease, and reputation; it is to keep within those bounds which God has fixed for the right government of ourselves, our appetites, and passions, avoiding all inordinate excesses.

2. *Sobriety relates to the whole man, body and mind.* As to the mind, it bounds and moderates our thoughts of ourselves, and enjoins us to take the measure of our own worth from what we have received from God, and not from any opinion that others may entertain or express of us. It requires that we have a low and modest opinion of ourselves, and guards us against pride, self-conceit, haughtiness, vain-glory, and ostentation. We are not to have an overweening conceit of our own abilities, not to condemn others, not to be insolent or imperious, not to stretch ourselves beyond our line. In this sense of the word *sobriety*, the apostle recommends to every man among the Christians at Rome, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith," Rom. xii. 3.

3. *As to the body, it consists in a regular and moderate desire, pursuit, and use of sensible enjoyments, such as are allowed for the promotion of its health and sustenance.* The correct notion of sobriety lies in neither denying the body what is useful and proper for it, as God is pleased to bless us with the necessaries and comforts of life; nor going beyond our necessities and stations, merely to gratify a sensual appetite, or, as the apostle expresses it, "using the world as not abusing it." 1 Cor. vii. 31.

4. *The apostle, in the text, considers the word in a more restrained sense, relating only to the use of meats and drinks, in opposition to gluttony and drunkenness.* I think it is evident from the context that this is his meaning; for immediately after the text, he adds, "They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the

night: but let us, who are of the day, be sober." As if he should say, the heathen, with whom is the night or moral darkness, who want the cheering light of the gospel of Christ, indulge themselves in riot and excess; but let us Christians, who are of the day, enjoying the luminous rays of evangelical truth, be sober, for that is one of the rudiments it teaches, Titus ii. 12.

5. *So that to be sober, in a limited point of view, is to use meats and drinks moderately, and for the purposes for which the almighty Donor bestows them.* The chief design of which is to render us capable of performing the duties of religion, as well as those of civil and domestic life, and doing good to others according to our ability, means, and opportunity. We should, therefore, use the gifts of Divine Providence, so as neither our reason nor health may be injured by them. To be sober, is to keep a strict and constant guard on our appetite, that we neither offend by a luxurious costliness in the quality, or excess in the quantity, of those blessings granted for the nourishment and support of the earthly frame. To this purpose are the words of Solomon, when tempting dainties are set before us: "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat," Prov. xxiii. 1—3. Also he says, "Look thou not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder," ver. 31, 32.

II. PRODUCE SOME REASONS TO ENFORCE THE PRACTICE OF IT.

1. *It is amiable and commendable.* A man governing himself by the rules of temperance, checking his sensual appetite, restraining his inclination, especially when in the midst of plenty and affluence, is a character of peculiar interest. Such a person fills his station in life with credit to himself, and answers the design of God, in giving him reason to be the guide and director of his actions. How gratifying it is to behold a man whom Providence has favoured with the means of procuring whatever his heart may desire, habitually to deny himself, subdue wrong propensities, limit and restrain himself to what is consistent

with and conducive to his health and support, without any excess. He that thus gains a conquest over himself, deserves a higher encomium than he that conquers a city or country. "He that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city," Prov. xvi. 32. The conquest of ourselves is more glorious; for one gained by reason is more noble to an intellectual creature than one gained by force.

2. *The contrary vices are odious and full of deformity.* In their progress they dethrone reason, and reduce the man to a level even with the brute. Reason is the glory of human nature, by which we are distinguished from animals, in the right use of which we are enabled to conduct ourselves with reputation and benefit: but to hurl this noble power from her legitimate seat, by giving heed to the demands of a low craving appetite, is the highest reproach.

Historians inform us, that the Lacedæmonians, in order to fortify their children against intemperate habits, exposed their slaves, when in a state of intoxication, to their contempt and derision. And really, if a drunkard could but conceive the ridiculous figure he makes, either as staggering along the streets, or disgorging his nauseous load, or stunning the company with noise and impertinence, he would not be in charity with himself, till he had cleared away this worse than brutal conduct by repentance and reformation.

These vices are a gross abuse of providential blessings, perverting them to purposes quite contrary to the intention of the Divine Author in bestowing such favours. They also occasion a serious abuse of precious time, which is dishonourable and disgraceful to a rational creature, who should know better how to value its worth. Life is vastly important, and the opportunities for performing its essential duties are fleeting and uncertain, and, when past, cannot be recalled. It becomes, therefore, a reasonable creature, rather to endeavour to recover lost time, by future attention and diligence, than squander away more, by associating with extravagant company, and indulging in riot and excess. (See 1 Peter iv. 3.)

3. *Excess in meats and drinks is an inlet to all manner of wickedness.* He who loses the government of himself, and the proper exercise of his understanding, by gluttony and intoxication, what crimes is he not capable of committing,

and under the influence of what restraints is he to prevent such conduct? Intemperance is the parent of impurity. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess," Eph. v. 18, or, an unbridled dissolution of manners. It prompts men to injure others, excites to quarrels and contentions, and often leads to immediate destruction. "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine," Prov. xxiii. 29, 30. It opens a way to the commission of the grossest crimes, and therefore Solomon adds, at the 33rd verse, "Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." In a word, it is fraught with innumerable evils.

4. *A luxurious life produces fatal effects.* It causes the ruin of health and constitution,—human life is shortened by its pernicious influences. The consequences often are, violent inflammation of the blood, the bloated dropsy, the shaking palsy, consumption, fevers, &c., the forerunners of death. Whatever pleasure intemperate persons may pretend to enjoy in gratifying their passions, they will experience bitterness in the end, when the bones are full of the sin of their youth. "And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed," Prov. v. 11. It also ruins the reputation of men, as well as their estate and family affairs. "The drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty," Prov. xxiii. 21. And then, last of all, it ruins the soul, without deep contrition and faith in Christ; for the apostle declares such "shall not inherit the kingdom of God," 1 Cor. vi. 10. To avoid all this mischief, to which an intemperate indulgence of our sensual appetites exposes us, "let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

III. SUBJOIN A FEW DIRECTIONS TO THAT END.

1. *Let us consider ourselves as under the all-seeing eye of God.* As David did, set the Lord always before us, knowing that all things are naked and open to his eyes with whom we have to do, Heb. iv. 13; and that he sees through all the light artifices by which we would excuse or discover any irregularities. Did we daily consider this, it would be a happy expedient to prevent all excesses.

2. *Let us secure a saving interest in Christ, and care-*

fully keep in view his shining example. He lived on plain provisions, and always maintained strict temperance both in eating and drinking: he never once exceeded in the least the bounds of regularity. He was sometimes at feasts, being invited; but even then he recommended, by his example, the doctrine he taught his disciples,—“Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness,” Luke xxi. 34. Herein, as well as in many other things, he has left us an example, which we should aspire to follow.

3. *Let us avoid as much as possible the society of intemperate persons, and never in one instance choose them for our companions.* “Be not among wine-bibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh,” Prov. xxiii. 20, lest you learn their ways, and insensibly fall into their sins. Bad company in this, as in all other cases, is most pernicious; for those who are contaminated with vice, will endeavour to corrupt others, and triumph in their success.

4. *We must use the greatest caution in those circumstances where we are in the greatest danger.* One of which is, when we are entertained by our superiors. The honour we are then apt to think done us, and the temptation presented to gratify our appetite, is very likely to make us forget the snare, and run into excess out of complaisance to the company. We ought, in such a case, to be particularly on our guard, since no pretence of civility to men, however highly distinguished, will justify our breach of the commands of God.

5. *Let us think frequently on the future judgment, and the strict account we must then give of our behaviour to the righteous Judge.* Intemperate persons must give a sad account of their abuse of providential blessings, which they should have received with thanksgiving, and used with moderation. In this particular then, “Let our moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand,” Phil. iv. 5.

THEŒA.

XCVI. SAINT PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 16, 17.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work."

WE are divinely taught, "That men ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is therefore a duty of universal obligation and essential importance to every rational being. We should, however, not only pray for ourselves, but for all men, and especially for "the household of faith." This was eminently the devout practice of St. Paul, who was a faithful "ambassador for Christ." He diligently ministered to the churches "in holy things," and daily sought their spiritual prosperity, by fervent prayer to God for them. He greatly rejoiced in what the Lord had done for the Thessalonians, and ascribed all the praise and glory to his name, chap. i. 3. He also affectionately addressed them, by instructive epistles, when distant from them, and kindly cautioned, advised, and encouraged them, as their circumstances required. And in the text he solemnly prays for their comfort and establishment in the faith and hope of the gospel. "Now our Lord," &c. In these words the apostle specifies the objects he addressed,—the gifts he acknowledged,—and the blessings he requested.

I. THE OBJECTS THE APOSTLE ADDRESSED:—"Now our *Lord Jesus Christ*," &c. The triune Jehovah is unquestionably the glorious object of spiritual worship. This important truth St. Paul fully believed, inculcated, and practically revered. In the text he distinctly addressed,—

1. "*God, even our Father*." The Almighty is a Being of infinite perfection and glory, the Creator and Preserver of all things. His greatness is unsearchable, and his essential character as God justly demands the supreme homage and adoration of all his intelligent creatures, Psalm xcv. 6, 7.

But the apostle mentions in the text, his relative and endearing character of Father, to encourage our approaches unto him. Though he is "a consuming fire," he is our heavenly Father; and therefore we are encouraged to come unto him with humble and filial confidence, Heb. iv. 16; 1 John v. 14, 15. He is not only "the Father of mercies, the Father of lights, and the Father of Jesus Christ," but he is also the kind, affectionate, and everlasting Father of all his believing people, Psalm ciii. 13; Jer. iii. 19. They are begotten by the word of his truth, adopted into his spiritual family, and "cry Abba, Father, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them," Rom. viii. 14—16. To him then let us come with child-like boldness, knowing that he is "God, even our Father."

2. "*Our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The apostle evidently "honoured the Son, even as he honoureth the Father." He regarded him as essential God, and worshipped and adored him with all the powers of his soul. The primitive Christians were of the same mind, and united in worshipping a trinity in unity, and distinctly adoring the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Phil. iii. 3. This is certainly a demonstrative evidence of the absolute divinity of Christ, who is the great God, and our Saviour. God alone is the object of worship, and yet we are taught to worship our Lord Jesus Christ himself; and hence it is manifest that he is the true God, and eternal life. As Mediator, he is also the only way to the Father, the medium of all spiritual blessings, and the God and Saviour of his humble followers, John xiv. 6. Such characters can claim the apostolic privilege, and say with devout confidence, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father." The text also describes,

II. THE GIFTS THE APOSTLE ACKNOWLEDGED:—"God, which hath loved us," &c. In this grateful acknowledgement of the divine goodness, three things are observable.

1. *The manifestation of divine love*:—"Which hath loved us." This is a manifest and glorious truth: "God is love," and all his works prove the infinite benignity of his character, Psalm cxlv. 9. He hath loved the world, and sent his only-begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins, Rom. v. 8; 1 John iv. 9, 10. But he hath special love to his believing servants, who are called, and chosen,

and faithful. He loves them not merely as his creatures, but as his peculiar people, and obedient children, 1 John iii. 1. His love is manifested to them, both in its outward acts and inward operations. It is graciously displayed in their redemption, and gloriously revealed to the mind in the work of salvation, Gal. ii. 20. It is "shed abroad in the heart," and "we love him, because he first loved us."

2. *The communication of saving grace* :—"And hath given us everlasting consolation." Some think these words are descriptive of the gospel of Christ, which is emphatically a dispensation of "good tidings of great joy," Luke ii. 10, 11, 14. It is a perfect system of grace and truth, the joyful sound of mercy and peace, Psalm lxxxix. 15, 16. When it is received in power, it is always accompanied with "joy unspeakable, and full of glory," and leads to the possession of "everlasting consolation," in the kingdom of heaven. Thus God gives to all his people present spiritual consolation, or "joy in the Holy Ghost;" and promises them eternal rest in "his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for ever more," 1 Pet. i. 3—5. This consolation is not carnal and transient, but divine, substantial, and everlasting.

3. *The bestowment of Christian hope* :—"And hath given us good hope through grace." The believer's present life is a state of glorious anticipation. They have continual "respect unto the recompense of reward, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." It is not the presumptuous hope of the wicked, which shall be cut off, nor the delusive hope of the hypocrite, that shall perish; but the good and joyous hope of the Christian, which is "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast," Heb. vi. 18, 19. It is holy and good in its object, nature, and effects; and is the gracious privilege of every follower of Christ. It is "hope through grace," being founded on the revelation, and produced by the influence, of "the grace of God that bringeth salvation," Eph. ii. 8. Such inestimable gifts demand our unfeigned gratitude, and should encourage us devoutly to desire,

III. *THE BLESSINGS THE APOSTLE REQUESTED* :—"Comfort your hearts," &c. These benefits the Thessalonian Christians had already partially received, and the apostle fervently prayed for them.

1. *Increasing felicity in the Lord*: — “Comfort your hearts.” They had been greatly comforted by the reception of the gospel which effectually worked in them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, 1 Thess. ii. 13. They had obtained pardon and peace with God, and abounded exceedingly in “the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope,” 1 Thess. i. 3. But as they had continual need of divine consolation, the apostle earnestly prayed that in all their conflicts, tribulations, and afflictions, God would abundantly minister suitable support, encouragement, and comfort to their believing hearts. And as spiritual comfort is always necessary, it should be diligently sought of God, who comforts the distressed, and is the joy and salvation of all them that put their trust in him, Isa. xii. 1, 2.

2. *Persevering stability in the truth*: — “Stablish you in every good word and work.” It is evident that these Christians had cordially embraced the gospel, as the word of God, and happily yielded submission to its vital and hallowing influence. But as they were continually exposed to numerous enemies and dangers, the apostle fervently sought their increasing establishment in all the doctrines, privileges, and duties of Christianity; that they might in every difficulty and trial “stand fast in the Lord,” 1 Thess. iii. 13. Instability is highly dishonourable to the Christian character, James i. 8. We should constantly pray to be divinely established, both in the word of truth, and the works of piety; that we may never be moved away from the faith and practice of the gospel. Growing stability in religion is not only desirable, but absolutely necessary, in order to persevere in well-doing, and abound in the work of the Lord, 1 Cor. xv. 58.

CONCLUSION.

1. This subject is instructive. It suggests correct views of the Divine Being as the object of worship, and the duty of living in communion with him.

2. This prayer is encouraging. It discovers the goodness and mercy of God to his people, and his readiness to comfort and preserve them unblameable in holiness till the day of Christ.

ETA.

XCVII. THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF TIMOTHY'S MINISTRY.

2 TIMOTHY ii. 25, 26.

“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth ; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

THE office of Christian ministers is, of all others, the most important. No language can adequately describe their high responsibility. The epithets by which they are designated are partly illustrative of this. They are labourers, watchmen, stewards, and ambassadors. St Paul, in the fullest sense, sustained this high office ; but when he wrote this epistle, he was drawing near the close of his ministerial career ; he was therefore anxious that Timothy, with whom he was in habits of closest intimacy, might be a good minister of Jesus Christ. He accordingly instructs him in every part of his duty ; in his studies, ver. 15 ; in his private conduct, 22—24 ; and, in the text, in his preaching : “In meekness,” &c.

I. THE CHARACTERS AMONG WHOM TIMOTHY'S MINISTRY WAS TO BE EXERCISED :—“Those who oppose themselves,” &c. This phrase is descriptive of sinners generally ; they not only oppose God, his gospel, his ministers, and his people, but they oppose themselves.

1. *They oppose their duty.* Duty binds them to fear God, to keep his commandments, to cease from doing evil, to “bring forth fruits meet for repentance,” &c. But all this they oppose.

2. *They oppose their conscience.* Besides the word of truth, which instructs us outwardly, we have a monitor within ; a conscience that accuses or excuses us ; justifies us when we do right, and condemns us when we do wrong ; and dictates to us in a thousand instances what to do. This living witness sinners oppose.

3. *They oppose their peace.* Is peace the result of pardon? (Rom. v. 1.) the conduct of sinners provokes God to punish them, rather than solicits him to pardon them. Is peace opposed to warfare? sinners fight against God. Does peace imply tranquillity and internal quiet? the heart of sinners is like the troubled sea.

4. *They oppose their safety.* Every living creature loves security, and seeks an asylum when danger threatens. Sinners alone rush precipitately into the most horrid danger; and shut their eyes that they may go blindly on to destruction.

But the subjects of the text were not only described as opposing themselves, but as being taken captive by the devil, &c. 1. *The devil is a tyrant.* And his power, artifice, and settled bent to mischief, make him the most dreadful of all tyrants. What was the tyranny of Pharaoh, Herod, Nero, or Caligula, compared to his? 2. *The devil, in order to exercise his tyranny over men, has snares by which he entraps them.* This refers to an artifice of fowlers, who scatter seeds impregnated with deleterious drugs, to lay the birds asleep, that they may draw the nets over them with more ease. The snares of the devil are the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. 3. *Having taken sinners in his snares, he leads them captive at his will.* One he leads into all the excesses of intoxication; another into the horrid depths of profanity; another into the labyrinths of worldly-mindedness; another to lewdness; others to theft, to murder, or to suicide. And all these are as completely doing the will of the devil, as if he had sent them a code of infernal laws, enjoining the practice of every abominable vice.

II. THE NATURE OF TIMOTHY'S MINISTRY:—"In meekness instructing," &c.

1. *It was a ministry of instruction.* Sinners must be instructed, not made religious by compulsion, by menaces of fines, imprisonments, or deaths. Nebuchadnezzar made a decree, that whoever spoke any thing amiss against God should be cut into pieces, and have his house made a dung-hill. However well intentioned such a threat might be, God will never thank any man for it. Sinners must be instructed, not terrified by appalling representations of damnation; for though ministers may persuade men by the

terrors of the Lord, yet these terrors should never be displayed until men are instructed. Sinners are ignorant, not, perhaps, in reference to the affairs of this world; they may be men of science, or of literature, or they may have a general acquaintance with persons and things; but they are ignorant of their moral condition; of the relation in which they stand to God; of the change necessary to pass upon their minds, to fit them for heaven; and of the duties they owe to society. There are two great points on which sinners should be instructed; the depth of their fall, and the method of their recovery; what they have done to ruin themselves, and what God has done to save them. They should be instructed familiarly. St. Paul used "great plainness of speech," and no minister should scruple to follow such a pattern. Pointedly—Sinners are too frequently accustomed to think, that the subjects upon which ministers treat do not immediately concern them. Hence instructions should have point and application. Seriously—Never were men more serious than the apostles.

2. *It was a ministry of meekness*:—"In meekness instructing those," &c. Meekness is opposed to wrath, and signifies a humble, gentle, submissive frame of mind, that is not easily provoked. Ministers have their provocations in common with others. The carelessness of many of their hearers,—the captiousness of others,—the little success of their ministry, &c.—all serve to excite irritable feelings. But nothing can justify their departure from the path of meekness. How unseemly does wrathful instruction appear! What little probability of its success! How much does meekness win upon the attention of men! How insinuating is instruction when blended with Christian meekness!

III. THE DESIGN OF TIMOTHY'S MINISTRY:—"If God peradventure will give them repentance," &c. The design of the gospel ministry is,

1. *That sinners may be brought to repentance*. Repentance, considered in an evangelical sense, implies a knowledge of sin—a godly sorrow of heart on account of it—a hatred to it, and a forsaking of it. It is easy to see how far God gives repentance: he pours out of his Spirit to show us the evil of sin—he gives the command to repentance—he gives the promise of pardon to all repenting sinners—he threatens

indignation and wrath against all impenitent sinners. But God's giving repentance does not supersede the necessity of our practising it. To suppose that God gives repentance as absolutely and as unconditionally as he gave us our being, is the most palpable of all absurdities. God gives the husbandman fields, and seed, and fruitful seasons, but he does not plough the ground, nor sow the grain, nor pluck up the weeds, nor reap the harvest. The design of the gospel ministry is,

2. *That sinners may be led to an acknowledgment of the truth.* The truth means the gospel, which emanates from a God of truth, which contains matters of truth, and whose ultimate object is to "lead men into all truth." But this truth sinners deny;—some deny its authenticity—some its peculiar doctrines—some its requisitions—and some its practical influence. But all penitent and repenting sinners acknowledge the truth. They do this mentally; there is an inward homage yielded to it. Verbally; they confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, and they acknowledge the gospel as the foundation of their hopes and the rule of their actions. Hence their acknowledgment is practical; their lives evince that they acknowledge the truth. The design of the gospel ministry is,

3. *That sinners may be recovered from the snares of the devil.* This is done by the regeneration of their natures: then their understandings are recovered from the devil's delusions, their wills from that false bias to evil with which they were captivated, and their affections from following the world and all its fascinating lures. The language of the text is very expressive, and it has reference either to a restoration to health from disease, or the regaining something which was lost: those who are in the devil's snares are morally disordered; and as it relates to the design for which God made them, they are lost: but by the influence of the gospel they are recovered.

From the text we learn,

1. *The madness and misery of sinners.* What madness for men to oppose themselves, and what misery to be captivated by the devil!

2. *The important duty of ministers.* They are to instruct sinners; how strangely those err who think that ministers should preach to saints only; sinners must be instructed,

so that they may repent and recover themselves from the snare of the devil.

3. *The happiness of saints.* "Their soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, the snare is broken, and they are delivered."

BETA.

XCVIII. PROFESSORS ADMONISHED.

HEBREWS iv. 1.

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

IN the way of salvation there are many difficulties. For besides opposition from without, there is much to be overcome within the man himself. First there is much ignorance and perhaps prejudice to be removed. Then in many instances, when the mind perceives the truth, the will rebels against it. And even when the sinner is convinced of, and inclined to, what is right, still the power of corruption may be too much for his weakness. Yet divine grace is equal to his restoration "from the power of Satan unto God." But even the subject of this grace is not beyond the reach of danger. Instances of miscarriage are numerous. Of this the apostle was aware: and therefore we find him, in this epistle, using every means with the converted Hebrews to prevent the evil. He appeals to their hopes. He appeals also to their fears. And as, for this purpose, he found no case better authenticated, so, to them, he found none more suitable than that of their forefathers, who had left Egypt with a promise of entering into the

rest of Canaan, but who, nevertheless, were not permitted to enter, he applies this to those professing Christians ; and says, " Let us, therefore, fear," &c. From which passage we may deduce several observations respecting the Christian's privilege—danger—and duty.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGE :—*promised rest*. Here we may remark—the character supposed—the blessing promised—and the security afforded.

1. *The character supposed* ;—" A promise being left us." If any of the Israelites had resolved to remain in Egypt, or had returned to Egypt, the promise of Canaan would not have applied to their case so soon ; the promise of entering into the heavenly Canaan peculiarly blongs to those who have turned their backs on spiritual Egypt, and are journeying under divine direction towards the " better country."

2. *The blessing promised* ;—" his rest." The word rest means either a cessation from servitude, labour, travel, &c. or an exemption from suffering. Hence, however the blessing may be partially enjoyed in this life, its fulness must be reserved to the future one. In the present we may have rest from the tyranny of sin, Rom. vi. 12—14 ; and from the distraction of anxious care, whether it precede our justification, and refer to our soul's safety, (see ver. 3,) or follow it, Isa. xxvi. 3 ; Rom. viii. 38, 39. Yet, however the Christian may have rest now from the clamours of conscience, painful forebodings, &c., it is to heaven that he must look for, (1.) *A rest from toil*. To that place we may apply, Rev. xiv. 13. In this respect, as in every other, the Christian rest is preferable to the Israelitish one. (2.) *A rest from pain*. If, in the present life, some have no necessity for manual labour, or if we are all allowed the relaxation of the sabbath, yet even on this day of rest from labour we may endure more of pain than a whole week of drudgery would give. Heaven offers an exemption from this. Glorified bodies are " safe from disease and decline." (3.) *A rest from sorrow*. Here the Christian, though " always rejoicing," may be nevertheless " sorrowful," because of the wickedness of mankind ; perhaps, of his relatives ; Rom. ix. 1—3 ; or even of religious professors, Ps. cxix. 136. But a brighter prospect unfolds itself, Rev. xxi. 3, 4. Nor should we consider this rest as a mere exemption from calamity. Even Canaan was more than that. And

its positive blessings may direct our thoughts to those of heaven : to represent which the Scriptures employ those things that now give us innocent pleasure, as the magnificence, &c. of a city, the beauty of a landscape, the charms of music, &c., and above all, the pleasures of religious devotion.

3. *The security afforded* is that of Almighty God. "A promise is left us of his rest, which he has prepared, revealed," &c. Men may promise largely, but not be able to fulfil. He is all-sufficient. And he is "the God of truth," and "cannot be tempted" to deception. He is good : witness his work of redemption. And he is unchangeable ; "without variableness," &c. And the rest is assured by his promise and oath, chap. vi. 16—18. Yet we must look at,

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S DANGER :—"Lest any of you should seem to come short of it." Much might be said here of danger from the world, and the wicked. But the apostle would have us concerned about what is nearer home : he regards unbelief as the principle of ruin, hence he is so earnest, chap. iii. 11, 12, 18, 19, and chap. iv. 3, 11. Nor is this without reason, for unbelief may operate destructively,

1. *By means of open transgression.* In these passages we are cautioned against the principle. In 1 Cor. x. 1—12, its sad effects are exhibited.

2. *By means of secret wickedness.* Hence lusting after evil things is deprecated, 1 Cor. x. 6 ; see also Matt. v. 28, and Ps. lxvi. 18.

3. *By means of worldly mindedness.* Faith apprehends invisible realities, and influences and saves us accordingly. But unbelief is the soul's blindness. When this prevails, worldly things prevail ; and carry us away into that state condemned, 1 John ii. 15.

4. *By means of indolence.* Faith prompts us to do, and sustains us in suffering, (see chap. xi.) Unbelief leads to negligence ; and neglect is ruin, chap. ii. 3. It is said that the word here rendered "seem" sometimes strengthens the sense. (See Bishop Pearce on Mark x. 42, quoted by Dr. A. Clarke on Luke viii. 18.) And this appears to be the case here. The allusion was to the Israelites who evidently came short, who were seen to come short of Canaan, and the example of whose folly has been but too often followed

in the Christian church ; but against which the author wished to guard those to whom he wrote. Accordingly he urges,

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY :—" Let us therefore fear." If ministers should be concerned for us, there is reason why we should be concerned for ourselves. If the apostle feared for the Hebrews, it equally became them to fear. And ministers and people may all be concerned,

1. *Because of the shame, the personal disgrace of coming short.* Not to pursue a worthy object when it is proposed, is sufficiently disgraceful. To relinquish the pursuit is doubly so. Even sinners despise such inconsistency.

2. *Because of the mischief of coming short.* It is the misfortune of the backslider to be disgraceful, or mischievous, or both ; and those who do not despise him are in the greatest danger of being hurt by his misconduct. The wicked are hardened ; the weak stumbled, &c. He is like one of the unbelieving spies who tempted Israel into sin and suffering, Numb. xiv. 4, 23.

3. *Because of the ruin of coming short.* Apostates sin against greater advantages, have gained a greater enlargement of capacity, fall from a greater elevation ; therefore their punishment will be more severe. " Let us, therefore, fear," &c. But how ? Not with a desponding paralyzing fear. Against this the epistle throughout encourages us. But, (1.) *With a fear of caution*, that properly estimates difficulty and danger, and induces circumspection, chap. xii. 12—15. (2.) *With a fear of vigilance* ; that narrowly watches first declensions, and promptly opposes the first advances of the enemy. (3.) *With a provident fear* ; that leads to husband our resources, to avail ourselves of the assistance of our fellow Christians, and to cry to the strong for strength. And let it be an abiding fear. " Blessed is the man that feareth always."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. God hath promised a rest. But let sinners remember that there is to be hereafter no middle state between this rest and that place of torment where there is no rest day and night.

2. In prospect of the promised rest, let saints sustain the hallowed cross : "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation," &c. And,

3. Let us exhort one another daily ; both by the example of those who have halted, and of those who "inherit the promises," chap. iii. 13, vi. 11, 12.

ZETA.

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